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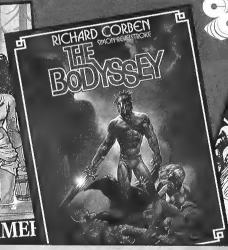

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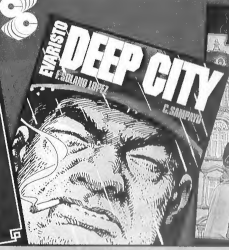

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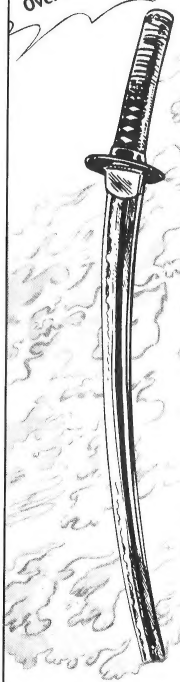

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If snow is your forté, the month of January in the Garden State is where you want to be. If, however, your goals include publishing a magazine, discussing the responsibilities of publishing in your editorial (as promised last issue) or keeping warm, forget it. Undoubtedly, something will crop up to change your plans. In the case of **Four Color**, several blizzards delayed getting this issue to press. However, the extra few snow-filled days allowed me to reflect on the current uproar in the comics field, industry guidelines defining good taste (as the publishers refer to it) or industry self-censorship (as many others refer to it).

Representing two of the opposing sides at the front line are protagonists Buddy Saunders, a major retailer, and Frank Miller, the prominent writer/artist. Saunders favors industry self-censorship and Miller opposes it, in favor of full, creative freedom. Both have been published at length in **The Comics Buyer's Guide** detailing their well thought-out positions. In deference to both parties, each have presented strong points supporting their passionate cause.

I was content to leave this battle in the pages of **The Comics Buyer Guide.** However, in the course of speaking with retailers and distributors across the country, I have been made aware of the fact that this is a situation that should be addressed. At first I dismissed this notion as not being worth writing about. I have changed my mind due to the importance of the topic. Industry self-censorship is a political and often emotional topic. By interjecting my views, I will undoubtedly offend one or more parties and may well lose readership as a result. I believe this is a small price to pay for an informed readership.

As not everybody is aware of this situation, here is a brief capsule of recent events: 1986 was an important year for national media coverage of comics. Almost overnight, the media has become aware that comics, as DC says, "Are no longer for kids." The exposure has been a double-edged knife cutting both ways. On the positive, the public at large has become more conscious of comics as a legitimate art and entertainment medium. Features about **Dark Knight**, the new Superman, **The 'Nam** and many others have educated the masses and helped to introduce new readers. Unfortunately, many scandal-hungry news hacks (we do not consider them journalists) have targeted comics as obscene material that should be kept away from children.

This cover, from ***Batman*** *#399, drew extensive criticism over its graphic depiction of a shrunken head. Whether or not the cover was in good taste is still being debated.*

Retailers have become more and more nervous of losing business or even worse, being shut down, for a variety of reasons amounting to the fact that misinformed, often narrow-minded conservatives view them as smut dealers. In this day and age, it is almost hard to believe a retailer really was arrested and charged with selling obscene materials (comics), to minors. It really happened. Saunders' views are representative of these retailers.

Already, the two largest companies, Marvel and DC, have responded to retailers' pressure. Marvel has announced they will restore the Comics Code Seal of Authority to their direct-sales line of titles. DC has issued a set of guidelines instructing their creators in what they deem appropriate for their line of titles. It is expected that other publishers will begin taking similar measures to Marvel and DC in the future.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, many comic professionals,

spearheaded by Miller, are balking at these guidelines. It is their opinion that the creative process should not be muzzled by any constraints. Further, they believe if publishers give in to fear, it may perpetuate to the same scale as **Seduction of the Innocent** did in the 1950s.

In a letter dated January 19, 1987 to DC Comics' Publisher Jenette Kahn, Miller, along with writers Marv Wolfman and Alan Moore, and writer/artist Howard Chaykin have issued an ultimatum: While they will honor existing contractual obligations to DC, they have stated they will not produce any new work while the rating system is in effect.

This pretty much brings matters up to date.

As I type this editorial, a new issue of **The Green Lantern Corps** (#212) – one of the titles DC intends to label as suitable for a General Readership – has just hit the stands. It features a gratuitous strip scene, with the villainess Star Sapphire undressing in front of Hector Hammond and taunting him with her body. Hammond, a villain, is paralyzed. The scene hardly seems in keeping with a title aimed at both older and younger readers.

While I applaud Miller's position in favor of total creative freedom, I am also a realist. Give a person enough rope and they will certainly choke themselves. If scenes similar to the one in **Green Lantern Corps** continue,, sooner or later it will not just be the ultra-conservatives who want to see the industry fold, it will be the vast majority.

Again, I'd like to allude to realism. The public at large does perceive comic books, especially those on sale at newsstands, as being targeted for children. That is certainly an inaccurate impression, however, one that many parents subscribe to. What would have been the result if **Green Latern Corps** had been picked up and read by the parent of an eight-year-old? Further, what will be the result when it is?

Make no mistake, I oppose censorship. However, I fail to see how a ratings system, similar to the one used in motion pictures (to responsibly identify content), is censorship. Labeling a comic "For Mature Readers" is a far cry from removing or preventing an art form. I consider it a pretty reasonable response to the needs and demands of the market.

When talents like Miller, Wolfman, Chaykin and Moore resort to ultimatums over labeling, they are ignoring the needs of people like Buddy Saunders, whose stores contribute to a major part of all creators' income. Make no mistake, without direct-sales stores, whose livelihoods are directly tied to community standing, there would have been no creative breakthroughs in 1986. In all probability, those same people who so adamantly oppose a ratings system, would be work-for-hires without specialty stores to cater to the older clientele.

Contrary to the opinion of Miller, adopting a ratings system is not giving into the pressure of the censors. It will not cause another round of senate hearings. If anything, it will help prevent another Wertham witch-hunt.

A ratings system, along with house guidelines, does represent a **change** and, like all changes, will require time to be widely accepted and effective.

Quite possibly, the ratings system will present a new set of problems and these may take time to iron out. I'd like to take a moment and address some of these potential problems.

For example, in a recent **Comics Buyer's Guide** guest editorial, John Byrne pointed out that if one rating sold better than the others, the majority of comics would be catered to that rating. This is prevalent in the motion picture industry especially: Compare the number of "G" releases in 1986 as opposed to the number of "R."

Also, who would define what comics are "For Mature Readers?" I would assume an advisory panel, made up of creative people and company executives. One such panel already exists, The Comics Code Authority, and look how ineffective they are. Any company can withdraw a title from the code and still have it distributed. If the code were given the power to

Below, the offensive strip scene from the latest issue of ***Green Lantern.***

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WHY ALL MEN MUST ALWAYS SUCCUMB TO THE POWER OF WOMEN?
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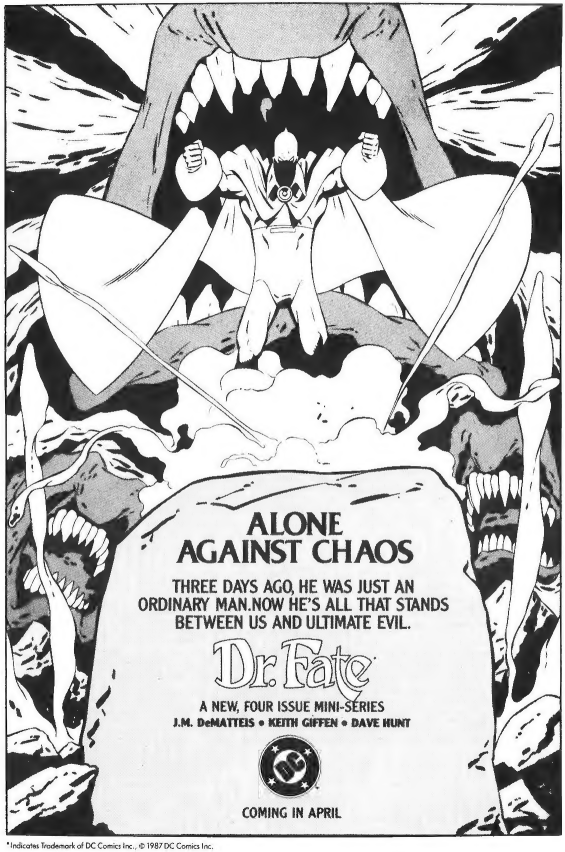
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police titles, odds are Miller and Moore would never be permitted the opportunity to expand the medium.

Finally, how can a "Mature Reader" be defined? Ms. Kahn, in DC's guidelines, defines a mature reader as being one who is an "adult" as opposed to an "adolescent." I challenge Ms. Kahn to define where adolescence ends and adulthood begins. Back when I took college psychology courses, we defined an adult as a person who is financially and emotionally prepared for the responsibilities of taking care of another person. Age had nothing to do with it.

Ideally, I would like to see the following labels and guidelines tested, over a one year period, and then evaluated for effectiveness by a joint panel of creators and industry executives:

1) Label comics either "For A General Readership" or "For A Mature Readership."

I would define mature reader as one being over the age of 18. If a person is old enough to be drafted, they can certainly read a mature title.

2) General Readership titles should avoid excessive violence and any depiction of sex or nudity.

Contrary to what this may suggest, human relationships do not necessarily need to be depicted by images of sex and nudity. In addition, an excellent story does not require excessive violence to promote the plot. Additionally, in General Readership titles, super heroes should be presented as just that, **heroes.** This is not to suggest they should be perfection personified. Rather, this suggests their motives should be in the best interests and well-being of humanity.

3) Keep Mature themes to titles labeled for a Mature Reader.

In these titles, violence and partial nudity would be permissible, provided they are used to advance a storyline. I would again like to emphasize that a "Mature" story does not need to translate to sex and violence. Some of the finest literature in the country does not rely on graphic depictions to convey a story.

4) Allow only General Readership titles on newsstands.

Newsstands and stationary stores cater to the general public. While perhaps removing Mature titles promotes to the misconception that comics are only for children, it may well be necessary to avoid future threats of censorship.

5) Comic book retailers should group mature titles into one specified section.

This should satisfy demands for retailers to police the products.

Finally, I would like to direct a comment to Miller, Wolfman, Chaykin and Moore. In Ms. Kahn's letter that accompanied DC's guidelines, she invited feedback and contributions from creators. Rather than present her with an ultimatum, how about taking her up on her offer. After all the years Ms. Kahn and DC have provided you work, they deserve better from you in this regard.

– David Caruba
January, 1987

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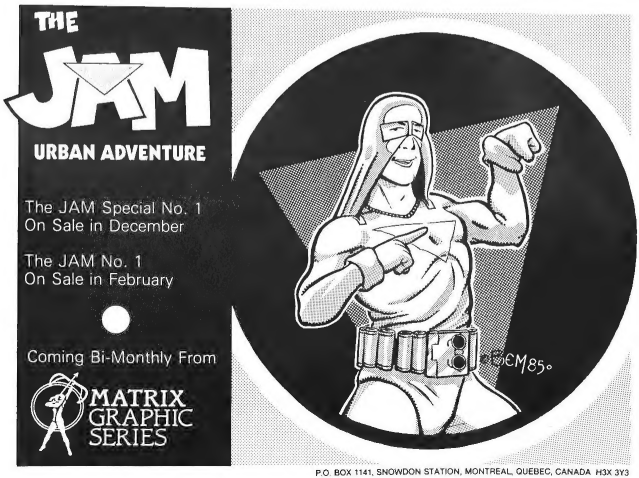

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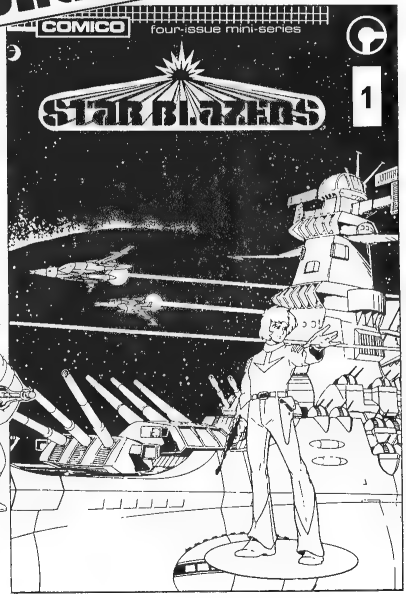

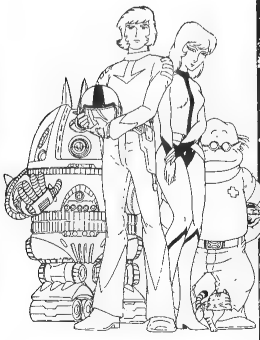

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letters

Four Color welcomes and encourages letters from our readership. Letters stand a better chance at being chosen for this page if they are typed, double-spaced. However, we do select letters based on value to the readership. We regret, due to our monthly schedule, we are not able to answer letters personally.

Editing duties for this section are shared by the staff, who try and prefer to print letters in their entirety, when possible. A complete address cannot be printed unless the writer requests it to appear.

All letters should be addressed to **Four Color** Magazine, P.O. Box 1146, Maplewood, N.J. 07040.

Kudos On First Issue

Michael Greczek
Houston, Tx. 77074

Sirs:

Congratualtions on your spectacular first issue. The comics industry certainly needs an upscale, pro-comics variety magazine.

Your articles, the pictures, your typesetting and the direct writing style all lend themselves to a beautifully done magazine the industry can be proud of. The fine paper reminds me of that used for **Time** or **Newsweek**. I'm sure that **Four Color** will be sought after by every fan.

Once again, congratulations and good luck in the future.

Thanks for your letter, Michael.

Vision of An Older Readership

Bud Plant
Bud Plant, Inc.
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Dear Folks,

Along with the other collectors at our Grass Valley warehouse, I was very impressed with the appearance of **Four Color #1**. We had expected yet another short-lived fan-news vehicle. What you've delivered (now that I've read it) is much more.

With the tremendous growth of the market, it should be time for a high quality comics magazine. If you are unfamiliar with **Graphic Story Magazine** (Bill Spicer/Richard Kyle, c. 1969), borrow some and take a good look. This was a mature, in-depth magazine that, even then, had a solid following and superb production values. There has been little like it since it ceased. **Comics Collector** and **Comicscene** were promising vehicles, but had to appeal to too young an audience due to their need for newsstand sales. I hope that you see **Four Color** as I envision as you settle into a schedule.

Some comments on the issue: Any news features are going to quickly date your magazine and ultimately hurt sales. For instance, **Prime Cuts** is already out as I read your news section. I feel strongly that you should leave the news for the **C.B.G.** and **C.J.** and **Comics Interview**, who do report more than most collectors want to know. Like PBS might do, if you insist on news, is go into real depth and bring out something that will not be common knowledge before or shortly after your new issue appears.

Reviews: Comic reviews are good as long as, again, you can break new ground. As a somewhat jaded fan of new comics, it might get me to pick up a series I long ago dropped; or check out a new mini-series I've passed by. But I'd like to see reviews of comics-related books, such as Ron Goulart's **History of the Comic Book** or the first volume of **The Great Comic Book Artists**. At $12.95 and $14.95, fans will be reluctant to pick these up; yet any collector that wishes to expand his horizons beyond today's books needs encouragement to learn about the past greats . . . it'll help him understand what potential comics have. Chuck Wooley, a long time fan and now auctioneer, has just published Volume One of his **History of the Comic Book**. Although brief, it is easy, enjoyable reading and is well-illustrated as it explores the origins of narrative strips and the origin of the comic book 1899-1936. Again, although a esoteric area, I think many people would be interested in this, just as I am.

DC RENAISSANCE: This promised a little more than it delivered, but I was expecting a lot from your slick package and blurbs. I agree DC has clearly turned the tables on Marvel

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and is producing the top innovative comics today. Marvel's New Universe has proven just how little creativity is left there. Yet Giordano hit the nail on the head; Marvel is the adolescent's comic publisher now and it is DC and the alternates that are providing the older audience with product that will keep them interested rather than turn them off. Hold the questions about "What's coming in issue #1" and further explore the potential DC sees in its future.

FORUM: I have a difficult time grasping. I liked parts of it, but Mark Ellis seemed to gloss over entire decades while expounding a bit too much like a **C.J.** writer about some deep philosophy of super-heroism.

ON THE RACKS smacked too much of the **Comics Collector** articles for early teens. I think you risk losing your audience if you cannot make up your mind to appeal to younger or older readers. Trying to satisfy both groups not only repeats what other publications are doing (even if you do it with greater skill) but it will turn off the older reader who's not interested in how to get a letter published.

Perhaps my vision is not the one you have for the magazine. But were I publishing, I'd do my utmost to target the same reader buying DCs and the alternatives, who knows some comic history and who Hal Foster and Walt Kelly are (or would be interested to know more).

Thanks for your letter, Bud. We appreciate you taking the time to critique our first issue. Your vision of Four Color is, for the most part, identical to our own. We see the magazine appealing to the die-hard, older comic reader, with a knowledge of the direct-sales market. However, we do believe the magazine offers something to readers of all ages/levels. We disagree in only one area, the news section. We believe there is a need for an accurate, detailed news section that is not written from press releases alone. We are still working on the section, designing it to delve more deeply into the news. Regarding the review section, we do agree with you. We have a copy of Ron Goulart's 'History' for review. At 400 plus pages, it takes a little time to read, but should make our next review section.

Milk The Cow, See "Platoon," Read "The 'Nam"

Brett Bessen
Philadelphia, Pa. 19107

Dear Folks,

Came across your first issue in my local comics shop and was sold on the cover immediately. Your British friend, Bill Bradshaw, is really something else. I'm surprised the powers that be at DC and Marvel haven't picked up on this guy. I am really looking forward to his upcoming covers.

As for the issue itself, I was very impressed. Your layouts are beautiful, clean and well thought out. I especially liked the Jon Muth article. His work impresses me and I'm glad someone finally did a feature on such a deserving artist.

I was also impressed with your presentation of the news. While I had heard about some of it from **The Comics Buyer's Guide** before your issue came out, I liked the fact that your articles went into more detail and were not pure hype. Nothing against the **Buyer's Guide** but I prefer your better presented approach.

Since you deal with the comics field, I'd like to share a few comments.

I agree with Jeff Kapalka's review of **Jonny Quest**. I think the series is excellent and enjoy the variety of artists. My favorites, so far, have been Doug Wildey and Adam Kubert. I have to admit I was not thrilled with Marc Hempel's and Mark Wheatley's version. In all fairness, though, I was not a fan of **Mars** – it was too cartoony and abstract. Incidentally, the **Quest** review was only one of three in your section. I'd like to see a lot more.

I find myself getting fed up with mutants also. I wonder how long Marvel plans to milk this cow? Don't get me wrong, I still buy and like **The X-Men**, but enough, already. At this rate, Marvel might as well launch The New **Mutant** Universe.

I saw the movie **Platoon** recently and was surprised at how much I understood the slang and references, having read **The 'Nam**. While it is hard to describe any war as "enjoyable," I highly recommend seeing the movie

and reading the comic. Both have enlightened me greatly.

We agree with your comments concerning Bill Bradshaw, although we admit being a little selfish. We'd like to keep him here for as long as possible. Our review section has expanded. We also urge our readers to see "Platoon" and check out Marvel's "The 'Nam." We guarantee you'll find not a single mutant.

60 Days 'Til Void — And Counting

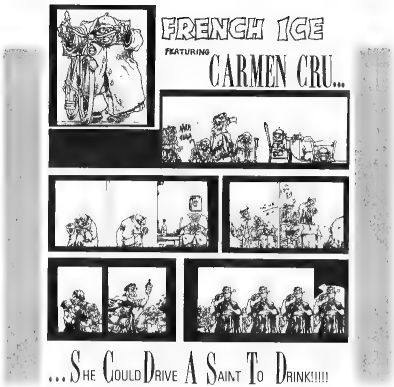
John Davis
Milton Griepp
Capital City Distribution, Inc.
Madison, Wi. 53713

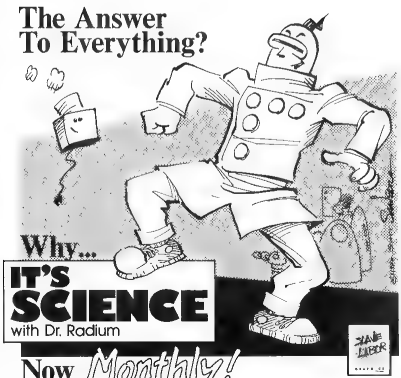
Dear Supplier:

Recently we have been beseiged with complaints from our customers about product that is released far after the time for which it was solicited. Many of these "problem titles" have been from publishers new to the market, but there are also some long-established publishers that are guilty of this. Product that is not released when it was scheduled makes it impossible for our customers to budget their purchases properly, or to account for seasonal variations in sales.

For some time, our purchase orders have had a statement in the upper right hand corner that says, in part, "This purchase order is void 60 days after the date shown in the 'Anticipated Shipping Date' blank." We have been somewhat lax in enforcing this provision. Beginning with the purchase orders this month, we will be closely monitoring release dates.

Our interpretation of the 60-day provision is that books solicited for January release should ship no later than the end of February. At the end of February, we will produce a list of product scheduled for January shipping that has not yet arrived. If you have product that falls into this category, you will receive a letter informing you that you should either resolicit for a new release date, or if you do not wish to resolicit, that we will only accept merchandise that is retur-





nable. We would prefer that you resolicit whenever possible.

We recognize that there will inevitably be occasional delays in release date. However, we **must** resolicit to give our customers the opportunity to change their orders when those delays go beyond 60 days. Thanks for your cooperation in this matter.

We feel it is the responsibility of publishers to deliver the publication on time. While delays will occur from time to time, they should not make a publication more than 30 days overdue. We commend Capital Distributors for taking steps toward improving this situation.

Capital's Position Ludicrous

Dan Vado
Slave Labor Graphics
San Jose, Ca. 95128

Dear Sirs,

First off, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on the debut of your fine magazine. In two short issues **Four Color** has become the class act of the comics industry.

I would also like to comment about the subject of late comics. I find it ludicrous that Capital City, of all distributors, would announce a policy about late comics when it is their lax performance when it comes to paying publishers that contributes to the problem most small publishers have in meeting deadlines. While it is true that Capital City Distribution's purchase orders state the order is void 60 days after the anticipated ship date, it is also true that these same purchase orders say that they will pay within 30 days of the invoice date.

Capital City is not the only offender, or the worst. It's just that if they are going to enforce a policy that some people are hoping will become an industry standard, I would hope they would set an example for the industry by paying their bills on time. When a large distributor like Capital goes over 100 days past due on an invoice, it makes it difficult for a small publisher like ourselves to pay the printers and artists who have completed work for us. And I can't tell you how much having to call up several distributors in a single day and beg for money that was due to us two months ago robs me of my dignity.

I would hope that whatever Capital City and the other distributors do to deal with the problems of comics that ship late, they not take unilateral action. Rather, they should discuss the problems with the publishers in question. Slave Labor Graphics has yet to receive a letter from Capital City or any other distributor for that matter that states a policy regarding late comics.

My biggest fear is that since we are a very small publisher, we will be forced into a position where we will no longer be able to publish. Just because we are small doesn't mean we don't deserve to be treated with respect.

We would welcome hearing from other publishers in the same situation as Dan Vado. Is late payment from distributors as wide spread as we seem to believe?

Greetings From Spain

Jose Maria Mendez
Madrid, SPAIN

Dear **Four Color** friends,

First of all, congratulations for your magazine. It's very...how will I say it...impressive. I am writing with the first issue at hand, and I don't know which one will be on the streets when this letter arrives—so some things could be different on **Four Color** by then. However, here I go. Of course, this isn't necessarily the way it should be, but the way I would like it to be:

$2.95 is a good price, I think. I hope you will keep it for a long time.

The paper is a very good paper, also. Maybe too good. I mean, that quality of paper gives the magazine a distinctive look, a nice weight on the hands. But it seems to me sort of wasteful when it's used for b&w pages. I suggest it would be better to keep that paper for the color pages, but use a cheaper kind for the b&w ones. Thus, it would be easier to keep the price at its current level, or even grow in pages.

I find the first issue somewhat lacking in variety. This could be a problem for a brand new magazine, or maybe this is the way you want it to be.

I wish to see more criticism in your "News & Opinion" and "In Review" sections. I mean harder criticism. If this or that stuff is good, say it. It it happens to be garbage, go ahead, destroy it. I think controversy can do a great deal of good for the comics field.

Well, that's all. I truly believe that your magazine has aces in the sleeve enough to become one of the finest magazines about comics.

Nice hearing from you, Jose. We'd love to learn how you got an issue of Four Color in Spain. To be honest, we like the quality of paper the magazine is printed on. We feel it sets Four Color apart from other publications in the field. It also has no effect on the cover price, as our printer mass buys it by the truck-load and it is part of the package he offers us. While we are not guaranteeing to hold the same cover price, we'll do our best. We have, incidentally, expanded our recent issues to 72 pages.

Let The Fun Begin

Byron Benedyk
Gary, In. 46409

Dear **Four Color**,

At long last a review column that lets the reader get in on the fun!

I couldn't agree more with Joseph J. Cicala's assessment of Captain America. The series has been slipping badly the past few months and it finally hit rock bottom with the terrible Slug story in issue #325.

I haven't read a bad issue of **Jonny Quest** yet, and it looks as if Jeff Kapalka hasn't either. I also prefer the rotating artists, as Messner-Loebs does a great job of matching the story to each artist's particular strength.

So far your reviewers are batting a .1000 with me, but I know that eventually they're not going to call one the way I see it, and then the real fun will begin.

This is an open invitation to the everyone. Beginning next issue, the review section will print reviews and opinions from you, the reader.

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ECLIPSE COMICS

news and opinion

n&o

SOLO AVENGERS TO BEGIN IN AUGUST

First there was the **Avengers**. Then came the **West Coast Avengers**. Now, beginning in August, those two series will be joined by a third Avengers title each month, **Solo Avengers**.

According to Avengers editor Mark Gruenwald, **Solo Avengers** will have Hawkeye as the lead feature and the back-up will be "any other person who has been or now is an Avenger. That's about 20 characters."

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Gruenwald continued, "The team for Hawkeye is [writer] Tom DeFalco and [artist] Mark Bright. No inker has been named yet. The Hawkeye feature will be the continuing one. As far as we can tell, he's the most popular guy in the Avengers who doesn't already have his own book. Any time we put him prominently on the cover, sales go up.

"The back-up in the first issue will be Mockingbird, Hawkeye's wife, in a story that will just so happen to spin-off from the Hawkeye premier. Tom DeFalco's doing the story and I don't know who's doing the art yet."

"The basic plan for the first year is that all back-ups are going to be one-part stories. That way I can feature 12 different Avengers to offer the readers maximum variety. I may open it up a bit more in the next year and allow multi-part back-ups."

Avengers fans may be wondering which of their favorite characters will be seen in **Solo** action first. "We'll probably hit upon the active members of the Avengers first. We've got a Captain Marvel story...Dr. Druid...Tigra...She-Hulk...Wonder Man, definitely..."

Regular Avengers-scribes Roger Stern (East Coast) and Steve Englehart (West Coast) may be putting in quite a few appearances in the **Solo Avengers** back-up slot. "The two regular Avengers writers have first dibs on doing stories that run sideways from the continuity of their regular features. If we don't have room to explore the ramifications of somebody's personal life problem in the group book, we'll do it in **Solo Avengers**."

Although Gruenwald wrote and drew a **Hawkeye** mini-series in 1983, he will not be contributing any stories or art to Hawkeye's new series. This is due to a Marvel policy that does not allow editors to write stories for their own books.

However, some of the villains Gruenwald created for the **Hawkeye** mini-series may be popping up. "I have told the writers who are doing the back-ups that I don't want them to steal another hero's villains. I don't want Dr. Druid to battle an Iron Man villain. Iron Man **needs** all the villains he's got."

"What with people like Scourge out there killing off a lot of the old super-villains, we need to start creating new ones. That's one of the things I've insisted on. It also creates a lot less problems in coordinating the continuity of the villains if they appear nowhere else," Gruenwald added.

"So in Hawkeye's case, as long as they're his villains, I have no problem with them turning up. As far as the characters who will be appearing in the back-up, most of them have never had their own series, so they'll probably be fighting a lot of new villains."

Although Hawkeye is married to Mockingbird, Gruenwald said he expects the archer to mostly work alone. "Mockingbird may show up in some of the stories, but the book is called **Solo Avengers**, so I don't think we'll see a lot of team-up action."

Each issue of **Solo Avengers** will contain two 11-page stories, a format that Gruenwald expressed great satisfaction with. "I still love the old **Tales To Astonish/Tales of Suspense** double-feature format. I think a lot of Marvel characters were at their best in 10-11 page installments. But I'm not the first Marvel editor to bring back this format. Carl Potts is currently doing **Strange Tales** with Dr. Strange and Cloak and Dagger."

Gruenwald concluded that he feels there is enough demand for a third Avengers book. "The team books are doing real well – they usually sell in the top 15 books each month. They do even better if we're not doing any special projects in a given month. And as for Hawkeye, this is our chance to test the waters to see if he can sustain his own book."

– Barry Dutter

MARS ARTISTS CONTINUE QUEST

Big news on the **Jonny Quest** front. After months of speculation as to who will take over the art chores now that the series is ongoing, Comico has announced the team of Marc Hempel and Mark Wheatley will begin with issue #14. Joining the two will be colorist Catherine Mayer. This team, best known for their work on First's **Mars**, previously contributed the artwork for "Guns For The Laughing Man" (**Jonny Quest** #3) and are scheduled to do a story in issue #10.

Illustration by Marc Hempel

"We had enjoyed working on both issue #3 and #10," said Wheatley. "It was a pleasant surprise to be asked to continue."

According to Comico Administrative Director Bob Schreck, as popular as the rotating artists on the previous issues have been, it would just not be possible to continue. "Basically, the reason why we're doing this is so Bill Loebs (writer of the series) has a team that he can work with. It is one thing working with Diana Schutz (editor), but she doesn't draw the book."

Schreck added that the team was chosen because of their art style, a cross between the serious and the cartoony. He said they really captured the spirit of the series.

"One of the reasons we like **Jonny Quest**," said Wheatley, "is because it has the solid sense of adventure we enjoyed on **Mars**. It's a bit more straightforward than **Mars**, but that kind of goes where we've been headed recently. We've been honing our storytelling skills."

Both Hempel and Wheatley said they work closely on all projects, often switching roles of penciller and inker. Issues #14 and #15 will be penciled by Hempel and inked by Wheatley. Their roles will switch with the following issue. "We're going to label everything, of course, but just to keep everybody confused we're still switching off jobs," said Wheatley.

Also debuting in issue #14, said Schreck, will be a new coloring process known as "blueline." The process, similar to how animation cells are produced, separates the black line drawing from the color art. The black line goes on a piece of film acetate, allowing the artist to color underneath on a piece of paper. "The advantage is that you come up with absolutely bright and vivid colors," explained Schreck. "Normal photography muddies colors that have been drawn on the black lines. This process separates them, allowing the colors to be laser-scanned. "Matt Wagner and the Marks boys have pretty much been the kings of the blueline," said Schreck.

As for future storylines, Wheatley said he would like to do a Bandit story. "One is already scheduled (done before the new art team takes over) but Bill Loebs has promised us another."

Hempel and Wheatley have committed to a six issue run on **Jonny Quest.** Whether they continue or depart after the run will be determined later, according to Schreck. He also said Comico still has several **Jonny Quest** inventory scripts and art on file and these will also pop up in the future.

Below: A sample of Hempel and Wheatley's Jonny Quest. Above right: The two artists rendered at work in their studio. Hempel is on the left.

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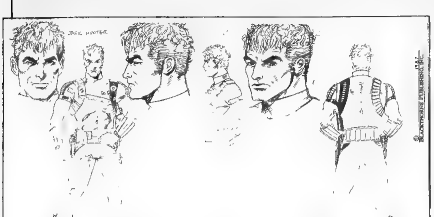

Character sketches of Jack Hunter, a former government assassin who maintains a sense of right and wrong.

BLACKTHORNE GOES TO COLOR

In June, Blackthorne Publishing will inaugurate a new line of 10 color comics to augment its current output of black-and-white titles, now numbering 20. The new titles will appear under Blackthorne's "Timeline" banner. Company President Steve Schanes described the additions, Blackthorne's first venture into color, as a major advance for his organization and, conceivably, for the industry itself.

The 10 new comics, that will be released two a month from June through October, form one integrated universe with intertwining plots, premises and characters. Schanes feels the major asset of the group will be that they are not interrelated but completely self-contained. Thus, it will not be necessary for readers to buy more than one title, if that is all they choose to follow, in order to understand the intertwining storylines.

However, each comic is written in such a way that readers, if they enjoy one, will inevitably be hooked into buying the rest. For example, August will see the debut of **Bringers**, a sword and sorcery saga about several races of magicians deriving their powers from elemental forces. "Bringers" refers to a particular race and its specialized ability to invoke these forces. In September, a "team book" about a galactic police force called **Omega Elite** will be released. It so happens that one of the Omega Elite is descended from "The Bringers."

The initial idea for the Blackthorne color "universe" was provided by Schanes himself, who gave the chore of actually creating the characters and plotlines to Mark Wayne Harris. The "bible" Harris produced provided information to writers on every aspect of the universe, not just those pertaining to the individual comic they happened to be writing for. In all, Harris created nine of the 10 titles and he also handles the writing and editing on several of them.

Schanes believes this approach will catch on not only with readers but with the industry itself. "The public perceives Marvel and DC, and their products, as being stagnated," Schanes says and adds that Blackthorne is ready for some very serious competition. Although few have come close to actually threatening the two industry giants, it is easy to imagine Schanes' operation as a serious contender. Blackthorne is the only comics company with 60 sales representatives in the field selling their products to both specialty and gift stores. Blackthorne even has a Hollywood agent, Lee Caplin, to represent them on options and film deals based on their comics. So far, several studios and independent producers have expressed interest.

Blackthorne's color line will include, in June, **Outposts**, a comic featuring two stories. The first, **Darkling**, chronicles the saga of chaos personified fighting against other beings of chaos. The second, **Mad Seven**, is about a warrior robot created by one of two mad computers competing for control of the planet Earth. That same month will see the first issue of **Jack Hunter**, the story of an ex-government assassin now walking the streets killing people left and right but still managing to maintain, so we have been assured, "a sense of right and wrong is written by Bruce Jones and will debut with a Joe Kubert cover.

In July, **Omni Men** (written by Steve Terry and drawn by Mark Beacham), the continuing story of a group of government-recruited super heroes will appear, along with **Locke**. Based on a short story by Mark Wayne Harris, **Locke** depicts the adventures of an intergalactic angel of death who performs much-needed assassinations in the name of the space-time continuum and is commanded by a mysterious "Council of Death." **Locke** is written by Bruce Jones.

August will bring **The Bringers**, for whom writers and artists have not yet been signed. Harris envisions each magic race in **The Bringers** as having a political organization similar to those existing in the world today. Thus, the format is a perfect means for writers to express any political messages they might have tucked away. **XL** will premier next. The letters stand for Xavier Lawrence, a spoiled rich kid who, after breaking his mother's heart, his girfriend's back and most of the bones in his body (the latter two when his car was hit by a drunk driver), is hooked up to a bionic system. XL is only at his mental and physical peak when experiencing an adrenalin rush, so he continually seeks out dangerous situations in order to precipitate just such a reaction. **XL**, written by Chris McGillivary and drawn by Denis Francis, is a spokesman for M.A.D.D., Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Wind Rage blows in in September. The title is a code name for a very special secret agent, an expert in martial arts, who happens to possess a mechanical arm. **Wind Rage**, written by Mark Wayne Harris, will also tackle

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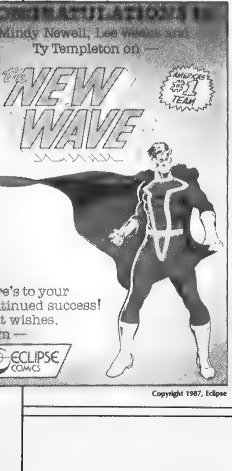
the paranormal from time to time. Then comes the aforementioned **Omega Elite**, the interesting twist herein being that the characters are permanently based in space. Harris is critical of other space comics that portray a universe filled with an infinite number of alien races, all humanoid. In **Omega Elite**, there are only three species in the universe with intelligent life.

Next, in October, will come **Operative Scorpio**, a very strange comic indeed. Operative Scorpio, we are told, is one man, yet three different men. First is Aristotle Andropolis, Greek playboy with a penchant for gambling, then Morgan Pierce, a policeman and Jay-Daniel Cobra, athlete extraordinaire who uses weapons that test his physical endurance. Harris would not reveal how the characters are tied together but promises it will be explained in the first issue. Finally **Sonik** is the more conventional super hero title. It concerns the exploits of Mercham Ryan, reluctant heroine born on the artifical planet Omega. She travels to Earth, where she uses a versatile sonic throat implant to fight the forces of rottenness.

– Glenn Magee



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NEW WAVE BEACHED

Eclipse Comics has announced the cancellation, following issue #13, of **New Wave**, that had been the first 50 cent comic published in the United States since the late 1970s. **New Wave** will reappear as a two-part 3D "micro-series" in April before disappearing entirely as a regular title. Eclipse's Cat Yronwode said that some of **New Wave's** continuing characters will reappear in the company's other comics in the near future.

New Wave had premiered shortly before **Airboy** in July of 1986 but the two were closely identified because of their bi-weekly schedule and 50 cent cover price. However, **New Wave** was almost completely overshadowed by the now successful **Airboy**. Reviews of the two comics in fan-produced publications tended to completely skim over **New Wave** in favor of **Airboy's** nostalgic appeal.

Ms. Yronwode said this was in part due to **New Wave's** more conventional super heroes. "Our readers seem to like characters with more of an unusual twist to their personalities," Ms. Yronwode said, citing Eclipse's pantheon of popular super heroes with strongly individualistic qualities and even questionable ethics.

New Wave went monthly with #9 in November. Depending on who one talks to, this was due either to poor sales or to the inability of the **New Wave** crew to meet the bi-weekly deadline. The comic was written by Mindy Newell, pencilled by Lee Weeks and inked by Ty Templeton. Ms. Yronwode maintained that hangups in **New Wave's** schedule were due to the difficulty in handling its complex characters and storylines within a bi-weekly format.

New Wave did develop a small following, but readers were largely apathetic. Dealers, on the other hand, were quite consistent in their response, that was decidely negative.

This ad for ***New Wave*** *appeared only a month before the title was cancelled.*

This was most likely due to their aversion to lower priced (and therefore less profitable) comics occupying a great deal of shelf space. After dismal advance orders on **New Wave** #12, Eclipse decided to cancel the series. There was still some material left after #13, so the decision was made to produce a two-part 3D comic. Three dimensional comics, as a general rule, do not have to sell as many copies in order to make a profit.

ECLIPSE NOTES: **Destroy!**, Eclipse's "loudest comic in the universe" will be reprinted in a 3-D, regular-size version in March. The original edition, at 11x15 inches, carried a $4.95 price tag. The new edition will retail at $2.50 and be printed on Baxter paper. "There were undoubtedly some readers who didn't pick it up because of the price or size," said Jim Friel, Eclipse's sales manager. "Now we're making it possible for them to have the same material in a regular-size comic book package, with the added dimension of 3-D." Ray Zone will, of course, provide the 3-D separations...

ESPERS will be gaining the artistic skills of British veteran John Burns beginning with issue #5, according to Publisher Dean Mullaney. Burns is perhaps best known in this country for his work on the British adventure comic strip, **Modesty Blaise**. "Since John is doing full color paintings for each page, we're upgrading the format of the book to Baxter paper," said Mullaney. "We feel very fortunate to be working with John Burns."

– Glenn Magee

ASSASSINS AND MARSHALLS JOIN FIRST

First Comics has announced two new series to appear in 1987. In May, **Lone Wolf and Cub** will begin its monthly run. The series is a reprint of **Kozure Okami**, a 15-year-old Japanese series that appeared under the Seminole Samuri graphic novel label. Each of the first 12 issues will feature a new color cover and one page introduction by Frank Miller and Lynn Varley, best known for their work on **Dark Knight** and **Ronin**.

According to Kurt Goldzung, First Comics' sales director, the book,

Road Hogs

New!!!

Post Holocaust mayhem continues as you explore the highways and the byways of the **west coast**. It is a land dominated by mutant animal bikers and savage gangs. Adventures will pit characters against wild and wooly road hog gangs, marauding robots in Silicon Valley and then south of the border in a life and death struggle against "the Dragon".

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Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles & Other Strangeness loyally adapts the comic book with each character, from Raphael to Casey Jones, depicted complete with background and abilities.

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created and written by Kazuo Koike and drawn by Goseki Kojima, tells the story of Ogami Itto (the "lone wolf") who was, "One of the main shogun's assassins." Itto is set up by the Yagyu clan, the head shogun's family of assassins, to look as if he committed a murder. Itto and his son, Daigora (the "cub") exact revenge on the clan and the series details this. The series originally comprised 28 volumes and the total page count is around 14,000.

First will present a special first issue of 96 pages on light Baxter stock selling for $1.95. Subsequent issues will also be at that price and the page count will vary from 64 to 96 pages, depending on the length of the chapter being reprinted. It should be noted the series is in black-and-white with a color cover

Copyright, 1987, First Comics

June sees the premiere of a new series licensed from Filmation entitled **Bravestarr.** The book and cartoon show detail the adventures of a marshall who is recruited to a rogue planet to enforce law and order. The tag line, summing up the series is, "They needed a thousand lawmen. They got just one. He was enough." The artist for the series will be Gerold Forton (last seen as the artist for **Nexus** #31) and no writer has been signed as of yet.

Mattel released a series of figures from the series for the Christmas, 1986 season. The company has also started a multi-million dollar advertising campaign for the toys.

One major difference between **Bravestarr** and other TV adaption comics is that the comic will be targeted for a direct market audience and not a juvenile one. The Bravestarr character will, evidently, encounter two different forms of adventures, one aimed at TV-watching juveniles and the other on a slightly higher level.

The TV series has, at present, been sold in 80 percent of the syndication markets across the country.

FIRST NOTES: First Comics is releasing a one-shot promotional comic entitled **Six Pack**, that will introduce the First stable to new readers. The 50 cent, 32 page black-and-white comic will feature three to five pages of story and art from six different First issues. The sections, taken from **American Flagg** #42, **Badger** #25, **Dynamo Joe** #8, **Grimjack** #36, **Jon Sable, Freelance** #49 and **Nexus** #34, each involve some sort of cliffhanger or climactic moment that is resolved in the comic that they were excerpted from. Included with the excerpts will be brief descriptions of the characters a la the introductions now appearing on the inside front cover of each First comic. The cover is a painting that Dave Dorman did of the First characters that was released as a poster in early January.

—Ken Scudder

RIGHT TO INVADE X-FACTOR, POWER PACK TO TACKLE TRASH

The career of the Angel will soon be coming to an end, according to **X-Factor** scripter Louise Simonson. However, the character will be reborn with new powers in a new costumed identity.

The transformation of the Angel begins in **X-Factor** #17, in which, "We find out how Angel deals with the loss of his wings and how other people react to what Angel does."

That issue also features "the introduction of some new villains called the Right, who are humans out to destroy mutants. Also, we find out what [**X-Factor's** lawyer] Cameron Hodge is really up to."

Over the past few months, **X-Factor's** arch-foe Apocalypse has been recruiting villains for his group, the Four Horsemen of Apocalypse. The first three members were War, Famine and Pestilence. The fourth Horseman, Death, will be the Angel.

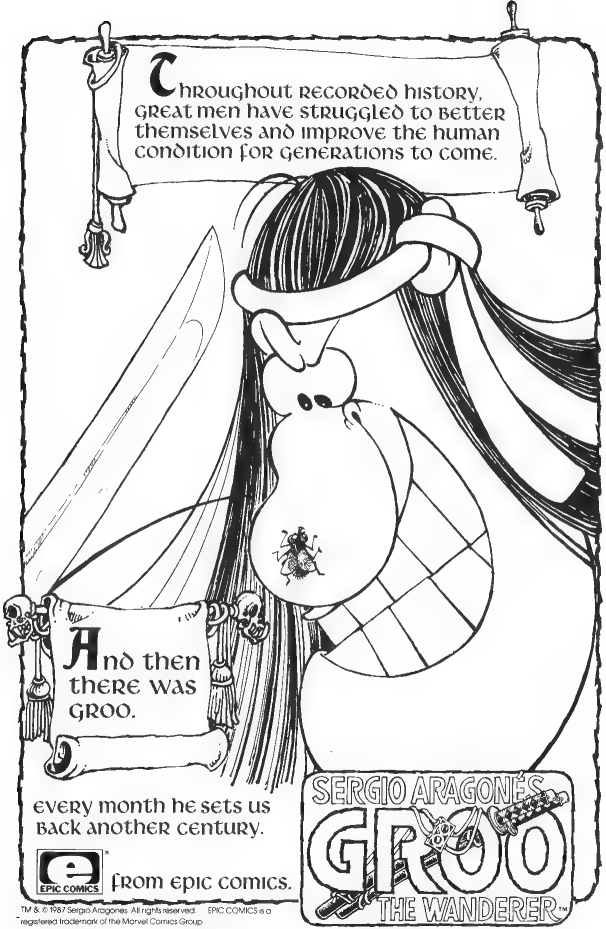
"Apocalypse is going to take the Angel and re-make him in his own image. We'll do a whole 'fall-from-heaven' riff."

Among the Angel's new powers, "His wings will be sharp-edged. When he flies through things, the wings will slice them. They'll be sort of a flashier version of Wolverine's claws. The feathers themselves will be razor-sharp. When he flicks his wings, the feathers fly off like shurikens, and slice through things. He will be able to fly at super-sonic speeds and, when he goes very fast, his wings will make a screaming sound."

Despite losing the wings he was born with, Angel will still be a mutant. "The new wings are going to be mutant wings regrown and regenerated, rather than supplied from the outside. Apocalypse, as we know, can control the molecules of his own body.

"He's been around since pre-Egyptian times. He's very old and he's learned an awful lot about how things work, including the molecules of his own body. He's learned how to reclone or regrow Angel's wings, only in a different form."

Ms. Simonson stressed that the revamping of the Angel is not just being done to upgrade his powers, but also to make him a more interesting character. His life was perceived as


Throughout recorded history, great men have struggled to better themselves and improve the human condition for generations to come.
And then there was Groo.
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being too easy. "He had everything, now he has nothing, not even himself. So we'll see the stuff he's really made of."

But Angel is not the only member of the team due to go through some changes. "In issue #17 of **X-Factor**, we're beginning to see the changes in Iceman. Changes in the Beast take place several issues later, during the first battle with Famine, Pestilence and War (Angel sits that one out).

"The Beast will be zapped by Pestilence. When the healing starts, he is going to find that the serum he was injected with in issue #2 or #3 which made him lose his fur, has had some other effects as well. We'll see what they are as his body tries to fight the infection."

Ms. Simonson's husband, **X-Factor** artist Walt Simonson, added that issue #17 will also deal with the dual nature of the X-Factor team. "The fact that they have two different identities, mutant and non-mutant, will become a major focus of the storyline," said Simonson.

Simonson added that, "Issue #18 essentially involves a life and death struggle between Cyclops and Marvel Girl. They get down to the nitty-gritty and scrape."

All of this is leading up to the double-sized 25th issue featuring what Ms. Simonson described as "the good Angel vs. the bad Angel."

That issue will have "X-Factor vs. the Four Horsemen and Apocalypse." Added Ms. Simonson, "If X-Factor doesn't win, it **will** be apocalypse, more or less. The end of the world. So our guys better win."

Meanwhile, over in Ms. Simonson's other regular book, **Power Pack**, "We are beginning an anti-crack series, an anti-drug series that will probably run four issues. In the issues the Power Kids see what drugs and particularly the drug crack, is doing to people in their neighborhood.

"They decide to do something about it, going gradually higher in the drug-dealing hierarchy." They start with the dealers, then the suppliers, finally working their way up to the drug kingpin, who may actually turn out to **be** the Kingpin.

"Also we're going to be introducing our first group of kid super-villains. They call themselves Trash. They're society's throwaways."

Ms. Simonson added that with Mr. Fantastic and the Invisible Woman going on semi-retirement from the Fantastic Four, they will have "a lot more to do" with Power Pack, since their son Franklin is a member of that team.

Power Pack has also undergone a frequency change to every six weeks instead of bi-monthly. When the book went bi-monthly, Ms. Simonson and artist John Bogdanov committed themselves to other projects. Once those other projects are wrapped up, **Power Pack** could return to monthly status.

Simonson revealed that there will be an **X-Factor** mini-series due in late summer/early fall, "that will probably involve the kids and mutants that X-Factor has rescued. They might become their own group – that might be what the mini-series is about. They may become the X-terminators."

The artist for the mini-series will be Bogdanov. Ms. Simonson said the mini-series does not have a working title yet. She added that she does not anticipate an X-Men/X-Factor X-Over in the near future.

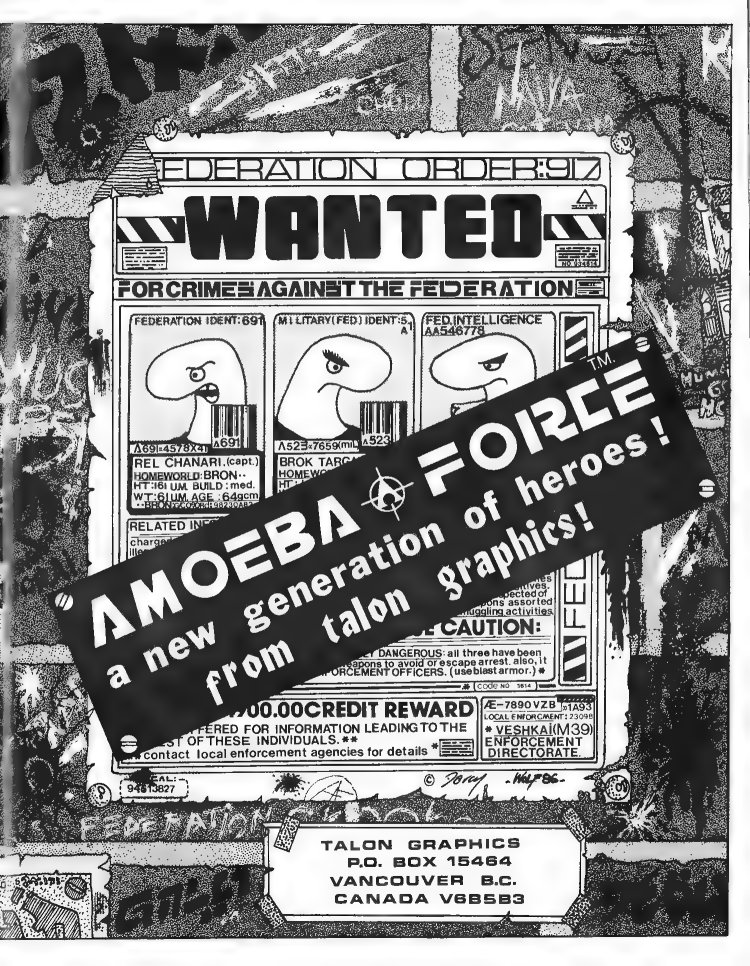
"I suppose, eventually, whenever [**X-Men** writer] Chris [Claremont] feels like having one, whenever it fits into the continuity. I think Chris is not quite ready for it yet. He's got plans involving his own continuity that preclude it right now." Ms. Simonson will be writing six issues of **The New Mutants** while regular writer Chris Claremont takes a hiatus. Her first issue will be #55, in which, "The New Mutants find a bird-boy, a being who has been artificially created by the scientists of the Right, the villains that X-Factor is also fighting. The Right wants to destroy mutants and create its own army of gene-spliced super beings.

"The New Mutants will scrap with the Hellions of the Hellfire Club for possession of the bird-boy. The New Mutants then learn where the bird-boy, whom they call Bird-Brain, came from, and see that there are other animal beings who are part-animal, part-human. Combinations are created to perform specific tasks, like reconaissance and undersea mining.

"The Bird-Brain segment and fight with the Right will run in issues #55 through #60. The artist will be the regular penciller of the **New Mutants**, Bret Blevins, although **Power Pack** creator June Brigman, whose most recent work is one **Alpha Flight**, will draw issue #56."

– Barry Dutter

Walt and Louise Simonson, two of Marvel's most popular contributors, relaxing at home.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How well protected are super heroes?

UPHOLDING THE COPYRIGHT

A frank discussion with Marvel Comics' copyright attorney.

By David Caruba

What do you do if your favorite pair of He-Man pajamas are in the washer? If you happen to be warm-hearted, well-dressed Balki (actor Bronson Pinchot) of the popular ABC television series **Perfect Strangers**, you retire to sandman dream-land in a pair of adult-sized Spider-Man P.J.s. Balki's nightwear was actually a one of a kind pair, designed by the producers of the series with Marvel Comics' seal of approval.

The producers approached Marvel for permission to use their Spider-Man character (not to have done so would have been an infringement) and provided the comic company with a set of Polaroid snap-shots of the proposed pajamas. Marvel evaluated their request and accommodated. Consequently, Balki's friendly neighborhood heroic P.J.s are slated to appear again in the future.

Marvel agreed to receive no payment for the use of their character, gaining exposure and promoting good relations. However, they did impose certain requirements, namely, that a copyright line had to appear in the episode. Their attorney, Steven Sheffler, who handled the arrangements, even got a brief credit for Marvel at the end of the episode. Referring to the credit, Sheffler added, "You'd have to keep your eyes wired not to blink in order to see it."

Sheffler is a member of Marvel Comics' legal staff. Far from the image of a pompous, fat attorney waiting to pounce at the jugulars of small companies – a popular misconception amongst comics fandom – he is a pleasant, softspoken man who specializes in copyrights, trademarks and licensing. His carefully trimmed black beard, tasteful brown business suit and sweater (in place of a vest) suggest a conservative nature. His law degree is from

The Hulk is copyright and TM 1987, Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Wolveroach, bearing a more than close resemblance to Wolverine, caught the attention of Marvel's legal department.

Cerebus is copyright 1987, Dave Sim

Boston University and he joined Marvel a year ago, after spending five years as an attorney with a trademark firm. He enjoys his work and speaks highly of his career at Marvel Comics, where his responsibilities include registering copyrights and trademarks, negotiating agreements and, admittedly, writing Cease and Desist letters that have in the past – before Sheffler joined the company – gotten Marvel considerable negative publicity.

The Aardvark and The X-Roach

The most famous example of this in recent years was a Cease and Desist letter sent to Dave Sim, creator, writer and artist of the very popular alternative series, **Cerebus**. In 1983, Sim ran a series of three covers featuring a character entitled "Wolveroach," a sort of inebriated, retarded take-off of Wolverine. "This was a copyright infringement," said Sheffler. "Obviously, we felt that this character was copied from our Wolverine. The costume, his hair, all his attributes were the same."

While Sim obeyed the letter, he printed it on his letters page exposing Marvel to unwarranted charges from **Cerebus** readers that once again the Mighty Company was picking on a little, starving artist. Sim, ironically, earned a sort of folk-hero status from the incident.

Sheffler does not deny that fans today still hold this view of his company. Not surprisingly, he feels this reputation is unfair and continues due to lack of understanding by fans of why Marvel needs to protect their properties.

"It seems that the fans think just because we're big, we're bad for wanting to protect our own properties. Our characters are Marvel's main business. Without our characters, we really have nothing to sell. Marvel wouldn't be Marvel if just anybody could have Spider-Man, Wolverine and all the rest."

Sheffler has a second reason for wanting to protect Marvel's "assets," as he calls them, a reason he is rightly proud of: "By protecting our property, we also protect the artists by assuring them a place to start. Once an artist has acquired a certain amount of fame and renown, there are other outlets." He added, one such outlet at Marvel is their creator-owned Epic Comics line.

Trademarks and Copyrights

Protecting Marvel's properties is a full-time, demanding job for Sheffler. His office could easily double for a war zone, a quality he acknowledges by warning guests he may need to clear a path to his desk. While his office is cramped and his desk buried in papers, Sheffler is clearly organized, quickly locating an oversized, bound volume of all Marvel's trademarks.

Sheffler explained that trademarks function as symbols, devices or markings used to indicate to the public that a particular property comes from,or is associated with, a particular company. "This originated back in the old guilds in England during the Industrial Revolution. The individual producers wanted to say these shoes or these bottles came from a particular manufacturer."

When somebody buys something with Spider-Man, there is some connection with Marvel Comics. If it is a comic book, shoe, balloon, whatever, there is some connection.

"To identify this, we use two symbols: The "R" in a circle means it has been registered at the Patent and Trademark Office in Washington, D.C. The "TM" means, while we are claiming it as a trademark and using it as such, it has not yet been registered. Either the application is still pending at the Patent and Trademark Office or no application has been filed." It should be noted that regardless of whether or not a particular mark has been registered at the Patent and Trademark Office, it is still the exclusive property of Marvel Comics.

Perhaps the most well known means of protecting a property is a copyright notice, a "C" in a circle. Sheffler compared a copyright notice to a patent because both stem from the same clause of the U.S. Constitution. "In a copyright, what you are protecting is the manner of expression of an idea. You're protecting yourself from being copied, literally, as opposed to a trademark where you're more concerned with somebody's goods or services being identified as your own."

In the course of his normal activities to protect his company'srights, Sheffler registers each Marvel title at the Patent and Trademark Office. He then checks a sample of every single comic, a monumental task, to make sure the proper identification appears. "I also get samples from our foreign, licensed publishers and I check the indicias and markings on those," he said as he pointed out a box in his office filled to capacity with foreign editions of Marvel titles.

He also supervises the renewal of registrations that were registered prior to the 1976 Copyright Act.

"I even check press releases that go out to stores, advertisements and notices on licensed products to make sure that everything having a creative element in it is protected. This puts the public on notice that we claim ownership and enables us, if it comes down to it, to pursue our rights in court."

Policing the comics market, even for a company the size of Marvel Comics, is dif-

Marvel attorney Steve Sheffler poses under the watchful eyes of copyrighted super heroes.

ficult. To cover the hundreds of newspapers and magazines across the country, Marvel relies on a clipping service that sends the company stacks of articles every week or so featuring some mention of the company.

While a clipping service helps cover the media, it does not explain how Marvel learns of other infringements, such as goods being produced illegally with their characters. These tips, reveals Sheffler, come from the creative people at Marvel and The House of Ideas' most loyal informants, the fans.

"Fans write us. We get a lot of letters from comic readers saying, 'So and so is ripping you off' and telling us who they are and what they're doing. This enables us to at least write to them and say, 'What you're doing isn't right – stop.'

"Most infringements are innocent. No harm is really intended. They just see something they like and decide to use it. After a letter or conversation there is usually no problem and it stops."

Handling An Infringer

Occasionally, Sheffler does come across a transgressor who refuses to stop. When this occurs, the case is turned over to an outside law firm that specializes in copyright and trademark violations. For the purpose of illustrating what proceedings follow, Sheffler discussed a hypothetical example surrounding an infringer who would not cease producing unauthorized Spider-Man dolls. "The outside attorney would probably send a Cease and Desist letter also and then file a lawsuit. We would sue them for trademark infringement."

The first actual step would be for Marvel's attorney to file a summons, an official order to appear in court, and a complaint, stating Marvel's position. The infringer would next file an answer to the complaint that, for this illustration will be, "No, we're not infringing."

"Next you go through a discovery period," said Sheffler, "where we discover from them all the use they've made [with the product and character] and they discover from us all the use we've made. We have to establish that we are the owners of the Spider-Man trademark and copyright and that their use infringes on our trademark."

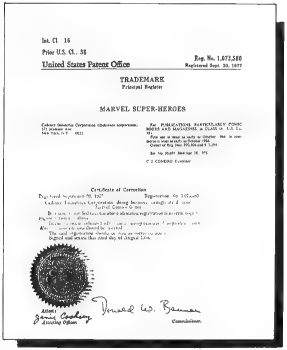
Finally, all arguments are heard before the court, usually a Federal court, and a decision is reached.

The reason Spider-Man was chosen for this hypothetical, is because according to Sheffler, he is Marvel's most infringed upon character. "The more popular the character, the more they are infringed upon." Not surprisingly, Wolverine and Captain America run a close second and third.

Sheffler sums up an infringement, or unfair use of a Marvel character, as follows: "I would consider one example of unfair use to be when material is just appropriated and resold as such. Where the purpose is to sell our material for our material. No changes, nothing is done to it. However, there are many types of unfair use and we must evaluate each particular use on a case by case basis."

Fair Use

On the opposite end of the spectrum and of considerable interest to comics collectors, journalists and retailers, is the issue of fair use. Can, for example, a fanzine use the name of the Hulk in an article on Marvel Comics? The answer, said Sheffler, is yes. "I would consider fair use of a Marvel character to be usage in an educational manner, news article or commentary. What you read in fanzines is a discussion about our material. It is not an infringement at all." Illustrations are a bit more touchy and should be run past Marvel legal department. However, a single panel reproduced in an article with proper



Int. Cl. 16

Prior U.S. Cl.: 38

United States Patent Office

Reg. No. 1,072,580

Registered Sept. 20, 1977

TRADEMARK

Principal Register

MARVEL SUPER-HEROES

Certificate of Correction

Commissioner

At left, Marvel's trademark for the term "Marvel Super Heroes." For the record, the term "Super Heroes" is jointly owned by Marvel and DC Comics Inc.

copyright and trademark notice, is usually permitted.

Comic book dealers are also usually permitted to use Marvel characters, however there are two stipulations: proper notice of ownership must appear under the character and a copy of the ad must first be sent to Marvel, prior to publication, for approval.

In some cases, the same holds true for store signs. "The problem with store signs is that we don't want the public to think that we operate the store," said Sheffler. "We want the public to think that they are selling Marvel products inside, so we have to see how that is arranged."

There is a another fair use of copyrighted characters, one that has been beaten to death recently in black and white comics, **parody.** Genuine parody is permissible under copyright law. However, there is a point where a parody crosses into an infringement. "A lot of them seem to be ripoffs and I really wonder if they are parodies or not," said Sheffler. As a consolation he added, "I suppose people will get tired of them."

The Invisible Line

Defining when a parody crosses an invisible line and becomes an infringement is very difficult to do. The line is entirely subjective – there are no hard and fast guidelines – and Sheffler points out that it is not uncommon for the line to be challenged in the courts.

Sheffler defines a parody comic as one that pokes fun at a character or title. He cites **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** as an excellent example. "A good parody is good reading. There really is something to it. I look at **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** and it's all original."

He defines a once-good parody that has become an infringement as, "One where you lose the originality. When you start narrowing your focus onto one character or group of characters you become less original. And where you may have them in funny, ridiculous situations, there really is less thought involved and more of just copying." In other words, if the parody incorporates too much of the original – of what is being parodied – it becomes an infringement. Also, if the parody is repeated, it becomes an infringement.

Megaton Man, Donald Simpson's character whose huge chest suggests an overdose of steroids, caught Marvel's attention. While Simpson's parody was never subtle – Megaton Man's button declared (in an unauthorized use of a trademark), "I eat X-Men for breakfast," – his lampoon of Marvel Comics was often very amusing. However, the early issues of **Megaton Man** were narrow in their perspective, limiting themselves almost exclusively to Marvel characters. The main storyline, carried over in a number of issues, seemed to only surround the exploits of the "Megatropolis Quartet," a super group modeled after the Fantastic Four. Marvel, naturally, objected and dropped Simpson a letter asking him to cease using their characters. Simpson changed the director of **Megaton Man,** purging the Marvelesque elements.

While Marvel took action with Simpson, they have not to date objected to Milky Way Graphic Publications', **XMEN,** although Marvel indicated they are in the process of reviewing it. Pronounced, according to the publisher, "ZHMEN," the cover clearly features characters based on their Marvel equivalents. In fairness to the black-and-white parody, it is clearly labeled, "Caution: This is not a Marvel Comic."

Another X-Men parody, Eternity Comics' **The Mighty Mites,** features a group of muppet-like characters clearly patterned after Marvel's popular mutant series. Again, provided the title remains a one-shot, it may be permissible. However, if the parody continues as an on-going series, it will cross the parody/infringement border and end up receiving a letter similar to the one sent to Simpson. Fair use, after all, does have its limits.

Squadron Supreme of America and Other Case Studies

A question of Marvel's fair use arose in the fan press over their maxi-series **Squadron Supreme.** Made up of characters allegedly derived from DC's **Justice League of America,** the Squadron seemed destined to be controversial from the moment issue one came out and billed the group as "The Squadron Supreme of America." DC Comics, it should be noted, did contact Marvel over **Squadron Supreme** and, according to Marvel, the two companies reached an mutually satisfying agreement. Both companies declined to reveal further details of the resolution.

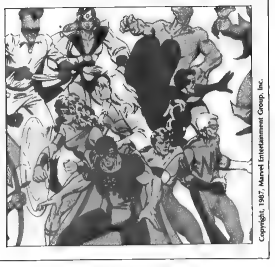
According to Sheffler, the only similarities between the Squadron and the Justice League were in some of the shared powers. Powers by themselves, it turns out, are not copyrightable. "What's copyrightable is the entire package." He adds, "How many characters are there with super speed?"

In truth, the members of Squadron Supreme look nothing like those of the Justice League. Aside from their powers, Sheffler contends there are no similarities between the two groups. Referring to the super-strong Hyperion, Sheffler added, 'Honestly, if you didn't tell me this was a counterpart to Superman, I wouldn't know."

Aside from **Squadron Supreme,** Marvel was questioned only one other time for similarities in a character or characters. Walt Disney Productions originally cried fowl to Marvel's resident duck, Howard, asserting he visually appeared too similar to their beloved Donald. "Ours really wasn't a take-off of his. Howard just happened to be a domesticated duck. Disney felt we were bringing their character into disrepute."

Although Marvel took the position of doing nothing wrong, a compromise was reached to save Howard from being

Fans claimed members of Squadron Supreme were similar to members of the Justice League.



brought to court and possibly roasted. Certain features of Marvel's duck were altered, specifically his beak and the location of his eyes, to the satisfaction of Disney. Marvel also agreed to limit reprints featuring the old version of Howard.

Another interesting situation that Sheffler describes as being similar to Disney's objections surrounded all-American wrestler Hulk Hogan using a trademarked first name. "We felt he was trading off on our character and that the public would believe there was some association with him and Marvel."

Similarly to Disney and to the obvious relief of wrestle-maniacs, an agreement was reached and Hulk Hogan was allowed to retain the use of his first name, subject to a license from Marvel. A quick glance at the fine print in CBS' comic book advertisements for their Saturday morning cartoon line-ups will reveal the line, "Hulk Hogan is a registered trademark of Marvel Comics."

Sheffler had hoped to get a similar line in the movie, **Kiss of the Spider Woman**, as DC Comics had done with the film, **Karate Kid**. While the producers refused to include a copyright credit, they did uphold an agreement Marvel had made previously with **Kiss of the Spider Woman's** book publisher. The agreement stipulated that the book publisher/producer not create a Spider Woman character or use it in a cartoony way. In this way neither the book nor the movie traded off on Marvel's character.

Ownership of Super Heroes

Had **Kiss of the Spider Woman**, or any movie for that matter, dealt with a character identified as a Super Hero, Marvel would certainly have pursued further. The term "super hero" is not, as is commonly believed, generic. It is, in fact, a jointly owned trademark between Marvel and DC and they must prevent the term from being used by other companies or it will fall into public domain. The Xerox, Coke and Pepsi people, said Sheffler, are in the same situation with their names. "We don't want the term super hero identified with anything but our, meaning DC and Marvel, characters possessing super human powers."

Reaching for his bound volume of trademarks on his desk, Sheffler quickly flipped to the listing for super heroes. The term is, as shown in the trademark, two separate words. However, it has been licensed in all its forms and varieties, in-

cluding, "For: Publications, particularly comic books and magazines and stories in illustrated form . . ."

Sitting back in his chair, at ease in his office, Sheffler reveals that he is not presently involved in any litigation over the term "super hero." He is, however, involved in preventing a French company from ripping off one of Marvel's actual super heroes – Spider-Man again – this time on a pair of sneakers. At the same time he is in the process of convincing a Japanese fashion magazine, **X-Men**, to change their name.

Marvel is also involved in **Rocketeer** discussions with Dave Stevens over whether the character belongs to Marvel. At issue is whether Marvel can prevent Stevens from obtaining a trademark registration for the name Rocketeer in view of Marvel making prior use of its villainous group, Rocketeers, before the creation of Stevens' character. "One of the reasons we are involved is because Marvel doesn't want to be foreclosed from using Rocketeers in the future," said Sheffler. "We feel there is some value to that. We would have some interest in it. Accordingly, we filed an opposition."

Like all attorneys, Sheffler does have a favorite anecdote, his set in the land Down Under. "We had in Australia an executive who wanted to do something for a children's hospital benefit. He was also a mountain climber. So, he dressed himself up in a Spider-Man suit and climbed a skyscraper without asking us permission."

"We were pretty upset. Aside from the infringement, you can imagine the bad press we would have gotten if the guy fell and injured himself." Skyscraper-climbing characters is also not the sort of real life image Marvel wants impressionable children to see.

From mountain-climbing Spider-Men to volumes of parodies, Hulk Hogan to the average fan who wants permission to print a Wolverine drawing, Sheffler, Marvel's copyright attorney, certainly has his hands full. At least in the future he'll have a little more breathing room: Marvel is moving him into a much-needed larger office with a window – the better to keep an eye on skyscrapers, no doubt.

Joe Cicala, Barry Dutler, Paul Haber, Jeff Kapalka and Will Murray helped contribute to this article.

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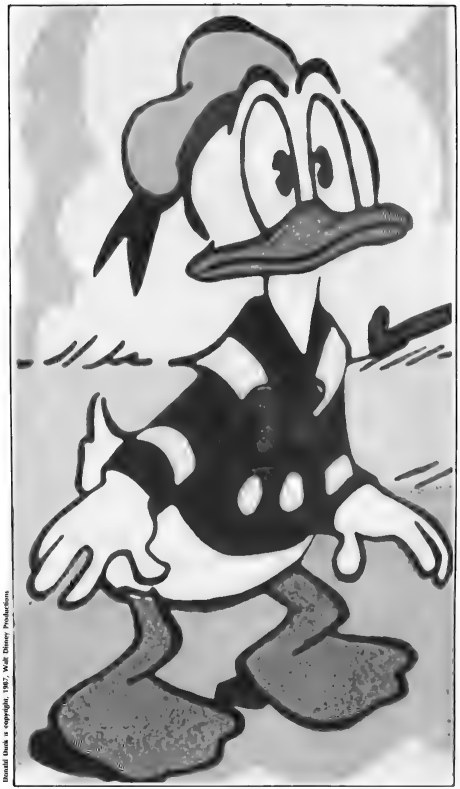

Donald Duck is copyright, 1987, Walt Disney Productions.

THE NUN WITH THE GUN

Protecting the religious downtrodden

By Mark Ellis

The theme of religious persecution is one that has appeared in all forms of literature for centuries, that is except comic books.

A few stories have touched on the subject in the medium from time to time, but usually in such a generalized and disguised form that all sense of immediacy was removed. Though First Comics' **Evangeline** series is set in the future, co-creators Judith Hunt and Chuck Dixon are not content to relate fanciful parables about religions in space. The stories contained within the covers of **Evangeline** are dramas intended to depict the far-reaching, and sometimes damaging effects of church politics and blind faith.

The title character, Evangeline, was introduced in Comico's short-lived 1984

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HUNT-VILLAGRAN

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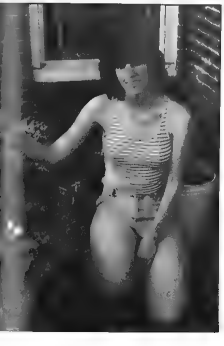


series. Though she lasted only two issues with that company, the impact of the concepts and characters were so powerful that at least three independent publishers competed with each other to acquire the rights. Deluxe/Lodestone reprinted the first two issues as a special, albeit months after it was announced.

Those initial two stories touted Evangeline as believing that "God's Law is **Her** Law" and depicted her sending criminals "to Hell, one by one."

Western Revenge

In actuality, Evangeline was more than a trifle ambiguous in the first story, coming across as a mysterious, female "Man With No Name." Highly reminiscent of a revenge-themed Western film, **Hannie Caulder**, Evangeline traveled the wastelands of colonized Mars gunning down the murderers who had destroyed a convent and the sisters therein. Discovering that an avaricious corporation know as Unetco coveted the nunnery's property and was behind the massacre, Evangeline first seduced, then calmly killed the Unetco executive responsible. Only on the last page (after she had poisoned the man with a particularly virulent toxin) did the readers see Evangeline dressed piously in a snow white habit.

A violent introduction indeed, though it was not precisely her "official" debut. In 1979, the character made her first public appearance in a British comics convention booklet. Physically, she was quite different than her current incarnation, but her purpose and motivations were unchanged.

Series creator and artist, Ms. Hunt, collaborated with writer Dixon to find that correct motivation: "What we were searching for was a good female character, but a character that wasn't a counterpart to a male character."

Evangeline's actual creation came about in a sporadic, almost metaphysical manner. Says Ms. Hunt, "Sometimes I'd have a dream, and Chuck would write down the dream. We'd take things from the dream that would connect and he would write something up. I would say yes or no or elaborate. He was better on action and I was better on the psychology, why people did what they did."

The psychological motivations were unclear in the initial outing. There was a strong focus on futuristic musketry, a lot of people were killed, and their passing was celebrated with a rather too loving attention to detail. Ms. Hunt admits that the Western overtones and gunfights were in part intentional to "try to appeal to readers who like action."

After all, a new comic series about a **nun**, of all things, was likely to puzzle readers who were accustomed to more straightforward hero(ines). Traditionally, tales of nuns, priests and so forth occur either in the past or in the gritty present. **Evangeline's** setting is the 23rd century, with all the technological advances that time-frame implies, but there is little of the open-hearted humanism that characterizes **Star Trek**. This attitude, though not cynical, states rather strongly that mankind will still have a high percentage of immoral, vicious representatives. Like the Western films Ms. Hunt cites as oblique influences, **Evangeline** presents the "final frontier" as lawless and untamed. However, Ms. Hunt hastens to add that, "**Evangeline** is not restricted to one particular genre. It's not a **Savage Tales** book!"

Multiple Levels

Ms. Hunt explains that there are many levels and textures to the series, most of which could not be discerned in those early Comico issues. Though Evangeline is a nun, sanctioned by the church and her immediate superior, Cardinal Szn, to employ violence in order to protect Catholics and the religious downtrodden, Ms. Hunt says, "She's not a vigilante. She is being manipulated. And she **knows** it's not right to have a license to kill."

Ms. Hunt, a 10 year veteran of the field, got her start at Marvel with a try-out Medusa story. In collaboration with **Evangeline** scripter Dixon, she did the art chores for the short-lived (and some may feel, deservedly so) **Gasm** graphic magazine. She wryly recalls the work she did there as "sleaze," and that the primary editorial edict was to "keep adding more breasts."

She has also illustrated children's books for Henson Associates (the Muppet people) and Disney.

Evangeline, however, occupies most of her professional time. She views the series as something of a stage upon which to present her own opinions and questions about religion, organized and otherwise. She states that, "Evangeline will more and more question the church, because the church is really into politics. We'll try to explore what turns people religious, with as honest stories as possible."

Though Evangeline was very much the firm-lipped avenger in Comico's incarnation, Judith says that she "will loosen up" in

Evangeline receives a very special gift from Papa John. Inset: Judith Hunt, co-creator and illustrator of Evangeline.

the future. She will also depict in greater detail Evangeline's duality of personality: "She has to keep her personal self separate from what she does."

The Sexual Angle

Dismissing the standard comic book heroine as "having a lot of problems because they always succumb to the sexual angle," Judith determined to avoid this cliched pitfall. She perceives Evangeline as being "untainted by her sexuality. She doesn't think of her body as anything but a vessel that she puts her mind into to do physical things. She can't conceive of her attractiveness. She can use it, but she can't get turned on by it."

Expanding on this unique characterization, Ms. Hunt says, "Mentally, she isn't even the age she really is. She's not very adult. She's come to terms with some adult things, but the basic piece that's missing out of her is her sexuality."

This aspect of her personality is evident in First's lead issue, "Dinosaur Farm," where Evangeline violently spurns Jonny Six's romantic advances. "The reason that bothered her," explains Ms. Hunt, is "because it started to awaken things in her that are all shut off. They're shut off for a reason. She only thinks of what her job is."

Future Storylines and Characters

Future storylines will return Evangeline to Earth, where she will be involved in a search for "Romanov Gold" in Russia and then in "R.A.D.S.," that will take place in the nuclear-wasted Mideast. The first part of an origin story will appear in the second issue with the remainder tentatively planned for issue #12. By this time, Ms. Hunt says, "Evangeline will become more aware that she's being used. Things really heat up politically with the church. By the 12th or 15th issue, it all comes to a head and the origin story will show her real motivations."

A new character, Brian Hager, will be introduced, though he will not be attracted to Evangeline, or vice versa. Ms. Hunt describes their relationship as "Willie Garvin to Modesty Blaise. He's a cynical Robert Shaw type."

Despite the fact that **Evangeline** often flies in the face of accepted religious conventions, Ms. Hunt declares that reaction, especially from Catholics has "actually been positive. The church is top-heavy with regulations and Evangeline doesn't always abide by them. Most Catholics can sympathize with that."

Since the protagonist is female, Ms. Hunt does expect to get many female readers. One third of the fan letters were from women. "For some reason," adds Ms. Hunt, "a lot of dealers and professionals also like the book. There are so many possibilities in the series that I think

CHUCK DIXON Discusses Evangeline

FOUR COLOR: Who do you perceive Evangeline to be?

DIXON: I often refer to her as a sort of James Bond to Cardinal Szn's M. She's an operative for the Vatican. She is not sent on missions specifically to kill, except on rare occasions. I realize it doesn't seem evident in the stories that have been published so far. They just involve violent action. She isn't sent specifically to cause mayhem.

FOUR COLOR: Would you discuss the series' creation? How did it come about?

DIXON: Judy [Hunt] and I came up with the character to try to sell it as a continuing feature to **Heavy Metal** or a magazine like that. We weren't successful.

Originally it wasn't as deeply thought out as it is now. It was very superficial, more of a space fantasy than it is in its present form. Evangeline was much more of a vicious character, amoral. As the years went by we continued the theme of the character. I sort of had the character in the backburner of my mind all those years. When we finally got the chance to do it as a continuing book, she came out in a much different form – grittier and more realistic.

FOUR COLOR: You mentioned originally she was amoral. Do you feel she is no longer amoral in her killings?

DIXON: No, she is very moral because she has a purpose. She is also a very tragic character. She doesn't really believe what she's doing is right but she's willing to make the sacrifice for the church.

FOUR COLOR: So she believes very deeply in the church?

DIXON: Yes. She has been brought up, as will be made clear in her origin issue **[Evangeline #2]**, by the church. She knows no other life. She has been very sheltered by them. Any information and any thoughts she has have been given to her by them.

FOUR COLOR: Do you consider her religious?

DIXON: I think she is a person who has never really thought about it. It has just been told to her. She has seen the world basically through Cardinal Szn's viewpoint – how he views the Catholic church and the world. She has been indoctrinated without any intellectual process. She's thought about it a lot on her own. And she has some viewpoints that will become clear over the next few issues, that she very much keeps to herself.

FOUR COLOR: Would you discuss her origin? Evangeline was an orphan, wasn't she?

DIXON: She is raised in an orphanage, sort of like a community farm, in South

that's why people are still interested two years after I left Comico."

The reasons behind the on-going interest are not hard to understand. The artwork in **Evangeline** is clean and sharp, and enhanced by Ricardo Villagran's crisp inks. It is one of the best looking books on the market today. Though the dialogue is occasionally spare to the point of terseness, it is always well-wrought. Plotlines pay attention to story values and are not simple stage settings for interminable fight scenes.

Evangeline at First

Rick Oliver, editor of First Comics, agrees, stating that when he saw the Comico issues, his reaction was, "How come we aren't publishing this? **Evangeline** always stood out among their other books."

Of the series' popularity, his opinion is, "It's an honest book. It doesn't pull its punches. It's something of a daring property, but it's not really a far-fetched concept when you take what's happening today into account."

Oliver downplays the violent content of the title, saying, "Religion is a touchy subject, but it is and always has been chock-full of violence."

He adds that **Evangeline** has received very little criticism of its themes. "It's hard to explain why the book doesn't get more flak."

He does admit, however, that marketing the series has presented a few problems: "In terms of promoting the book you have to skirt the religious issues."

Though Oliver describes himself as "a go-between" with the creative staff, he and First are very committed to Ms. Hunt's and Dixon's labor of love.

In a market dominated by mutant teenagers (and mutant turtles and hamsters), **Evangeline** is a draught of fresh, imaginative thinking. Though she is no stranger to violent death, Evangeline also calls upon her personal wisdom and religious beliefs to solve problems. She is very much aware that violence only solves conflicts in the short term. She has tasted defeat in her quest for a just and godly universe, but she is not defeated.

A "Nun With A Gun" she may be, a dangerous woman she is, undoubtedly. But she is also an Angel of Mercy who invests a hard-edged future with a romantic presence.

There have been only a handful of series that featured female protagonists and generally those were very consciously patterned to capture a female audience. And, generally, those series failed to attract the very readership they were contrived for.

The creators of **Evangeline** have dreamed up an evocative vision of the future – its venality, its corruption, its violence – but more importantly, its beauty as embodied by a single woman.

The concept, premise and character of Evangeline will hopefully set new standards in graphic storytelling. However, "The Nun With A Gun" is, and will remain, a very hard woman to follow.

America [run by the church]. Revolutionaries-for-hire take over the orphanage. Evangeline is the only one to escape. Basically, they are going to use the orphanage as a refuge to hold up for a while. Eva, with the help of Papa John, an old Indian, who is sort of a caretaker around the orphanage. He has taught Evangeline how to use a bow and arrow and how to hunt. So this is sort of the beginning of that part of her personality.

After she escapes to get help, she comes back and helps rid the orphanage of various scumbags. The end result is that she manages to do it single-handedly.

Cardinal Szn hears the reports and he's very intrigued by her. He has been having the idea for a long time of having an enforcer. He sees Evangeline as that person.

She is brought to a special school where she is taught the martial arts. By martial arts, I don't mean strictly the oriental, hand-to-hand combat. I mean everything – explosives, weapons, and advanced technology. Also it will be very much of a nunnery, a convent, to continue her indoctrination in the religious end of it. Cardinal Szn is trying to hedge his bets by trying to keep this a secret. He is limiting the training and enforcer operations to only one person, Evangeline. She is not from an order of nuns that go around killing people. She is unique.

The first part of the origin ends with her meeting Cardinal Szn. The second part of the origin will be seen a year later. We are sort of holding the second part, dangling it like a carrot.

FOUR COLOR: Could you just give an idea of the second part, without becoming too specific?

DIXON: It deals with the conflict in her mind between the two characters who are training her. One is Brian Hager who we will meet, I believe, in issue four. He is an Australian mercenary-type who is tied to the church because he provides church-backed revolutionaries in foreign countries with weapons. So he works for the Catholic church, even though he isn't a member.

The other character is Brother Phillip, who is sort of a mad Jesuit.

They are two extremes and Evangeline is pulled between the two as to what a man, her role-model, should be.

FOUR COLOR: Why the name Evangeline?

DIXON: It just sort of came about but it comes from **evangelist**. It has a religious ring to it.

FOUR COLOR: Evangeline is constantly referred and alluded to as an angel. Why?

DIXON: If you look at Evangeline, angel is just sitting there right in the middle.

The archangel Michael is her patron saint. Michael is also the patron saint of hunters. If you are raised Catholic, you sort of latch on to different saints that you like. When I was in Catholic school, Saint George was my favorite.

The archangel Michael appears again and again in the **Evangeline** series. In most of the promo art, Michael is somewhere in the background.

FOUR COLOR: Judith Hunt said she believes Evangeline is very, very innocent, untainted by her sexuality. Do you agree with this?

DIXON: Yes I do.

FOUR COLOR: Why, then, at the end of the second issue, is she crying over Jonny Six's departure?

DIXON: Jonny throws a monkey wrench into her indoctrination. She really likes him. I think there are the stirrings of deeper emotions for Jonny there. And that's causing confusion. Part of the crying is simply because of the confusion he is causing her.

FOUR COLOR: So you do feel she has emotions?

DIXON: Yes, but she doesn't know how to deal with them at all. She is very much like a child and doesn't know how to deal in that area of human relations.

FOUR COLOR: Do you see that area of her personality developing during the course of the series?

DIXON: Certainly. Jonny is very much the catalyst that will bring her thinking about what she is doing.

FOUR COLOR: Is this leading up to, in the course of a year, Evangeline breaking from the church?

DIXON: Probably not this year but later on. I see it as there will be a tremendous conflict and all the characters – Brian Hager, and Brother Phillip – will all be drawn into this and be a part of it.

F.C.

One lone artist remains withdrawn from bureaucracy

SHADOWS OF KAFKA

Steve Ditko.

Probably no more evocative name appears in the history of the American comic book. In an era when comics are achieving broader public acceptance and comics creators are coming out of the closet – so to speak – to bask in the kind of recognition formally reserved for actors, singers and novelists, Steve Ditko remains a lone holdout of that era when the men behind the comics toiled in impenetrable obscurity.

By Will Murray

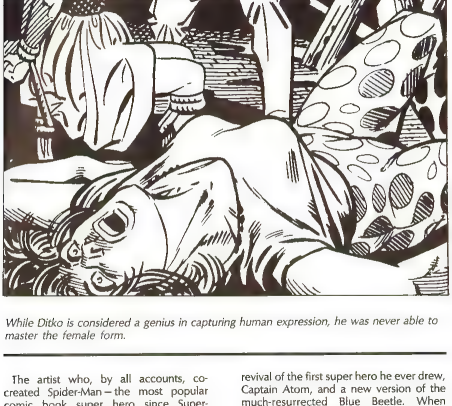


Illustration copyright, Steve Ditko

While Ditko is considered a genius in capturing human expression, he was never able to master the female form.

The artist who, by all accounts, co-created Spider-Man – the most popular comic book super hero since Superman – has not only avoided interviews and publicity, but has actively resisted them. Part of Steve Ditko's reticence might be attributed to the era in which he entered his chosen profession. His first identifiable comics work was a horror story published in 1953, a year when public concern was focused on the horror and crime comics – a concern that resulted in a sudden crushing of those genres in 1954, and the implementation of the Comics Code.

Early Years

Because Ditko specialized in horror, the backlash created a vacuum where, for about a year, he had little or nothing published. Ditko's early style was grotesque in the extreme and ill-suited to other kinds of comics. But little by little, he crept back into the field. For most of the fifties, the bulk of his work appeared in the now-dormant Charlton line, mostly science fiction and fantasy stories for **Space War**, **Unusual Tales**, **Strange Suspense Stories** and other anthology titles.

Then came his famous stint at Marvel Comics where he pioneered Spider-Man, Dr. Strange and drew the Hulk, among others. At the same time, he did **Gorgo** and **Konga** for Charlton, **Nukla** for Dell and after leaving Marvel, revolutionized Charlton's second-class status with a revival of the first super hero he ever drew, Captain Atom, and a new version of the much-resurrected Blue Beetle. When editor Dick Giordano left Charlton for DC Comics in 1967, Ditko followed him and spewed forth amazing characters like The Creeper and Shade, the Changing Man. Eventually he returned to the Marvel bullpen, but refused to draw either Spider-Man or Dr. Strange, much to the disappointment of his many fans.

Ditko's work is, well, **unique** is the only suitable word to describe it. Sometimes it shows traces of a Joe Kubert influence, but largely it was an animated Kafkaesque extravaganza, without identifiable antecedents. Ditko's work is sometimes unappreciated by younger fans, but in truth it has always had its odd quirks. A genius at depicting faces and human expressions, Ditko nevertheless never seemed to master the female form. Or at least the female form as defined by current American standards of beauty. His women, often blonde, are awkward, **zoftig** creatures vaguely resembling Jayne Mansfield or Marilyn Monroe. Even today, some of his panels possess an unmistakable retro-Fifties look. At the same time, he draws the truest aliens ever seen in four colors. Where lesser artists may stick insect features on a humanoid, Ditko always managed to evoke aliens who didn't **look** like us, but whose features evoked recognizable human emotions – wisdom, age, cunning and defeat.

Who is Steve Ditko?

His colleagues describe him as a bookish, blondish man with horn-rimmed glasses. Yet his quiet demeanor conceals an active, inquisitive mind. An acolyte of the self-relient social philosophy of the late Ayn Rand, Ditko delights in engaging his fellow professionals in long excursions into the nature of human values. But he seldom socializes, even with his collaborators.

Ditko may not have always been so exquisitely reclusive. He is supposed to have attended one of the earliest comics conventions held in New York City in the mid-60s and, finding himself beseiged by young, impetuous fans, retreated from the convention – in disgust or bewilderment, only Ditko himself can say.

Ditko has given only one published interview and that consisted of terse replies to written questions in a 1965 fanzine. His answers were unrevealing of personality, except when asked to give advice to aspiring artists. Then he launched into a lengthy summation of his drawing philosophy:

"Everything today," Ditko said in part, "whether it's a light bulb or the English language or a car, is the result of people building on the knowledge of people before us. Everyone adding something of their own...To show a man laughing means definite muscles must move, yet 10 different artists can draw 10 different pictures and all be right and no two drawings be alike. Basically, yes – they're all the same – since smiling action must conform to anatomy, but the artist's individual approach to how to show it sets him apart."

Suddenly, Ditko's bright intellect is seen at work, and then, sadly, the interview was over.

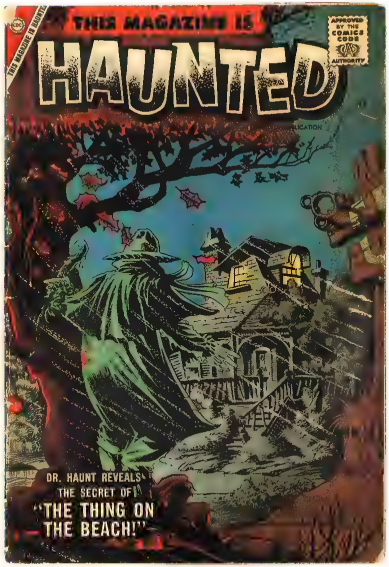
Ditko Tales

A story is told of the time when Jim Steranko, publisher of **Prevue** magazine, managed to interview Ditko by phone for a history of comic books. Steranko started off with a soft warm-up question. He asked Ditko when he first picked up a pencil. Ditko, offended by the banality of the question, simply hung up. The interview never happened.

Another famous Ditko anecdote occurred at a DC Christmas party in the late 60s. One writer, noticing that he and Ditko were the only attendees not in step with then-current hairstyles, walked up to Ditko and said conversationally, "I guess we're the only ones here without beards and long hair."

Ditko is reported to have given the writer the hairy eyeball and sniffed, "Do you resent not being a freak?"

Ditko's career has been a roller coaster. He has bounced back and forth between Marvel and DC Comics, with occasional



This cover from early 1957 is a classic example of a young Steve Ditko in his artistic prime

Illustration copyright, Steve Ditko

stops at lesser companies like Warren, Tower, ACG and Golden Key. He has seldom remained with one company for more than a few years at a given time. The one exception was Charlton, the company who gave him regular work during his early, difficult years. Ditko reportedly enjoyed working for the firm, despite the often atrocious scripts handed to him, because they had a policy of paying him whenever his work was reprinted. They also allowed him to draw his pages "twice up," which had been the industry standard until around 1966, when it was reduced to the cramped one and a half times the printed page size. Even when Marvel and DC offered him all the work he could handle, Ditko continued drawing for the lesser-paying Charlton group.

The Fly, Hawk and Dove

In recent years, Ditko has been plotting or writing many of his own stories. Critical reaction has been mixed. They do show an enormous – and very interesting in light of Ditko's reclusiveness – interest in interpersonal relationships. Although famed for his action sequences, Ditko apparently loves placing his characters in moral or even political jeopardy. Witness his work on Red Circle's recent revival of **The Fly**, in which much of the issue-to-issue continuity focused on attorney Thomas Troy's battle to keep from being disbarred. His war on crime as The Fly, consequently, took a back seat.

But these concerns can be traced back as far as the late Sixties and his brief DC

series, **The Hawk and the Dove**, in which two teenage brothers, granted awesome powers by an unknown being, act out age old questions about the nature of aggression and violence. It was a series that, unlike most comics even to this day, turned on a strong moral axis.

The ultimate Steve Ditko strip in that sense is, of course, his Ayn Rand-inspired Mr. A. It first appeared in late 60s fanzines, but later graduated to the alternate comics.

Mr. A (the A means just that: A. It comes from the Rand-ian tenet "A is A," meaning a thing is what it is and nothing more or less) is a force for good who dominates most of his cramped panels exposing his politcal and moral beliefs against an array of straw villains and ideas.

Mr. A has met with strange reactions. It is quintessential – perhaps essential – Steve Ditko, but its discursive, one-sided preaching has bored some readers and infuriated others. Ditko has never stepped out from behind the strip to engage in a dialogue on the subject, but in a recent issue of **Ditko's World,** one of his characters joked about a future strip called "Mr. A versus the Fans."

An Acquired Taste

It's an unfortunate remark because, if Steve Ditko has had consistent supporters over the years, those supporters have been the hard-core comics fans. Ditko's work has always been an acquired taste, one not shared by the average comic book reader.

Case in point: The most beloved era of **Spider-Man** was the early Steve Ditko-drawn years. But in fact, **Spider-Man** did not achieve high sales and widespread acceptance until the unexperimental John Romita and others took over drawing the title. And as revolutionary as his **Spider-Man** work was, many Ditko watchers considered his five issue run of Charlton's **Blue Beetle** technically superior to his **Spider-Man**.

Even those fans who do not care for Mr. A consider Ditko's short-lived Charlton character, The Question – in tone, mood and characterization very much an anticipation of Mr. A – among Ditko's most memorable work.

Ditko's Dr. Strange has a greater cult following than any other Steve Ditko character, but the irony of that is that its phantasmagorical fantasy elements drew to it an audience that Ditko seems to have had little in common with – the 60s counter culture. Going back to his earliest comics work, Ditko used long hair, Fu Manchu mustaches, male earrings and other bizarre hirsute adornments as symbols of evil and degeneracy. Suddenly, in the 60s, living versions of Ditko's wildest fantasies were passing him on the streets of Manhattan! It must have blown his mind.

Today, legions of comics readers abhor Ditko's modern work. But his fans continue

Mr. A has met with strange reactions. It is quintessential – perhaps essential – Steve Ditko, but its discursive, one-sided preaching has bored some readers and infuriated others.

Illustration copyright, Steve Ditko

Man's entrapment in a bureaucratic system is violently captured in this Ditko illustration.

Illustration copyright, Steve Ditko

to love him, no matter how he changes his approach to layout and inking, no matter how recondite his subject matter, and regardless of what terrible titles, like **Rom** or **Chuck Norris and His Karate Kommandos**, he chooses to draw. His current drawings may lack the crepuscular inking of his late 50s period, layouts may not be as involving as his 60s work, but the Ditko magic, muted or restrained by emotions we can only speculate about, still hums its unique tune. But that's not enough. Despite Steve Ditko's disinterest in his own fans, they remain fascinated with this shadowy latter-day Kafka. Since 1984, a fanzine devoted to Ditko's canon has been published and a copy of each issue of **Ditkomania** dutifully sent to Ditko himself. To date, he has not deigned a response. Ditko worship is the comic fan's version of unrequited love.

In Self-defense

Ditko was once asked by a DC editor to write a thumbnail sketch of himself to promote a new title. Ditko replied, "I never talk about myself. My work is me. I do my best, and if I like it, I hope somebody else likes it, too."

Ditko's philosophy has always been, "My work speaks for itself." And it does. Eloquently. But who speaks for Steve Ditko? Obviously not Steve Ditko

His colleagues and editors likewise decline to speak of him. Perhaps out of respect for his desire for privacy, but very possibly simply because they know no more about the man than his fans. Artist Al Williamson once recalled meeting Ditko during the 50s, when they both worked at Marvel:

"I met him once even before I knew he was an artist. I guess I was out to lunch with him somewhere. He was collecting movie stills. I think it's before he got into the comics that I remember meeting a fella by the name of Steve Ditko. He was collecting movie stills at Irving Claw on 14th Street – and I've never seen him again!"

Of those who work with him now, few

(continued on p. 66)

THE NEVER-ENDING SUPER HERO CYCLE

In a country encompassing millions and millions of people, hero-worship is a brisk trade.

By Mark Ellis

"When a country is young, it discovers its heroes. They may only be men who have had adventures others long for. They may show admired traits or strange ones. Always stories are told about them."

– From **Davy Crockett**
By Constance Rourke

Several years ago, shortly after the debut of the first Superman film, a spokesman for a fundamentalist religious group rallied against the psuedo-Biblical content of the movie. His basic objection to the film was it taught impressionable children to expect miracles from a man, albeit an alien one, not God, and that the world needed saviors, not heroes.

At about the same time, the newspaper of a radical, left-wing organization carried a review of the same movie. Using out-dated jingoistic rhetoric, the critic accused **Superman** of perpetuating an "imperialist myth." The gist of the review was that Superman was no longer needed, because the "masses" should not wait for a hero to clean up society; instead, they should band together to achieve political harmony, without regard to individual accomplishments.

Both points of view, coming from opposite ends of the philosophical and political spectrum contained the same cynical message: People (i.e., **Americans**), do not need heroes, especially of the sort who fly and wear embarrassing childish outfits.

The fundamentalists conveniently overlooked their own heroes (Moses, Samson, etc.), just as the radicals blandly ignored **their** own hero-building (Lenin, Mao, et. al.).

These people forgot, or never knew, that humanity in general and Americans in particular have always dealt in a brisk trade in heroes – and the more flamboyant the better. In no other media is this a stronger truism than in comic books. Super heroes have reigned in the four-color kingdom for nigh on half a century. Barring a short period where they temporarily fell out of favor, the super hero has never been more popular as a literary device than at the present time. Though both the fundamentalists and radicals may regard this popularity as a sign of sociopolitical/moral decay, people in masks and capes are still flying high.

Unfortunately, the Super-bubble has burst before and quite possibly will again. Therefore, comics creators and marketing specialists have undertaken a great deal of

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"The protagonists of the 'realistic' G.I. Joe and Vigilante books spend an inordinate amount of time playing around with state of the art implements of destruction, in spite of the fact that both series subscribe to the 'shoot to wound' school."

Unfortunately, jaded readers seem to construe realism with the amount of blood splattered on the pages. Frank Miller was one of the avatars of this particular movement, with his Daredevil being bloodily pummeled and hit by automobiles, but it worked within the story's context.

time and effort to insure that if there is another burst, their characters will not be victims of the fallout.

In the previous installment of "The Never-Ending Super Hero Cycle," the current marketing techniques of the various publishers to maintain reader interest were dealt with. Now, the issue of whether or not it will all work needs to be addressed

Trendy Coattails

Latching on to popular trends and fads have never really succeeded in comic books. Usually, by the time editors perceive certain trends and have their products reflect them, the fad has passed.

The Dazzler character is a perfect example of this type of awry timing. Subjected to numerous delays, the disco-oriented, roller-skated heroine appeared, **after** musical tastes had turned to punk and New Wave.

Longtime **Spider-Man** readers may painfully recall how Stan Lee torturously forced the characters into contrived "hip" (or was it "beat"?) dialect long after such speech and behavior patterns had acquired green mold

For years, DC's **Teen Titans** spoke as though they had been taught English by Maynard G. Krebs.

Part of the problem of grabbing on to the coattails of a popular trend is that there is often a four to six month lead time between story conception and publication. This is a long enough interval for a bandwagon to slow down, its passengers to jump off and the horses to run away. And the characters are left foolishly holding reigns that aren't attached to anything or any fad any longer.

This practice will never be totally abandoned by the industry, for if it increases the sales on only **one** issue of any given title, the experiment will be considered worthwhile. However, comics publishers are going about fad-following in a bit more roundabout fashion nowadays. Popular fads, as interpreted by comics characters, are distilled, and in many cases, redefined.

The degree of "timeliness" is certainly not the final arbiter of a hero's success, but if the character is new, transplanting a current social issue (or ill) on to him/her, certainly won't hurt – at first.

Innocence In Jeopardy

This kind of reasoning appears in comic magazines under a variety of guises. A common theme that has run thread-like through the cinema and TV mediums as of late is "children in crisis." The innocense and physical well-being of children, usually nubile teenaged girls, is placed in jeopardy. This elicits two basic responses in an audience; outrage over virtue in danger and titillation when a young girl is wearing next to nothing.

Even TV commercials designed to sell jeans present variations on this premise. Girls encased in skintight 501s or Jordaches are always either breaking up with lovers or running away from home.

The entire point of the theme seems to be presenting children as no more than adults with underactive pituitarys. The X-Men and the Teen Titans don't exhibit this particular trait very frequently anymore, but only because The New Mutants, Cloak and Dagger, Power Pack and other teenaged characters have picked up on it.

This method of increasing readership is easy and is also slightly ugly. It's easy because children, regardless of mutated genes, are more vunerable than adults and therefore reader sympathy is a built-in factor. It's ugly because it's cheap and exploitive.

The world-view as presented in **Cloak and Dagger** is particularly bleak. Not necessarily because of grim plotlines but because the protagonists are teenagers. They are drugged, shot at, abused physically and mentally.

Fourteen (or is she fifteen?) year old Kitty Pryde wears revealing costumes and is raped – at least mentally – by a demonic ninja. Her much older paramour, Colossus, spurns her love for an alien bimbo. Her father betrays her.

Granted, because of the strictures of the child-oriented premises, the kids **have** to be in danger from time to time. After all, Dick Grayson risked his life nightly, with little psychological scarring. Recently, however, Dick's protege, Jason Todd, seems to suffer far more emotionally from his travails as a Boy Wonder. This direction is certainly reflected in the artwork itself. Whereas Dick was presented as a husky, athletic teen-ager, Jason is drawn as a slight, almost effeminate youth. Therefore, the danger this boy finds himself in seems far more perilous than his predecessor went through. Jason is also far less confident and competant than Dick, relying on The Batman to make every decision. His devotion to the Dark Knight is heavily stressed. Tears course down his chubby cheeks at the thought of his beloved Batman perishing. He beams up at the Caped Crusader with unabashed adoration.

Perhaps this characterization is only questionable in light of the fact that **The Dark Knight** stated that poor Jason was dead, presumably killed in action. But nevertheless, the Kid As Victim theme is fast wearing out its welcome in all mediums as both a plot device and as expression of entertainment.

Realism At All Costs

As far as older, adult super heroes are concerned, the direction is veering sharply toward documentary-type "realism." This method was popularized during Frank Miller's first stint on **Daredevil**, but with the rise of the Rambo figure as a pop icon, it has been **de riguer** for almost all non-super super heroes.

The **raison d'etre** of Marvel's "New Universe" was based on this premise. Unfortunately, the New Universe titles are pretty much like the "old" universe, except the characters do not show the urge to

play dress-up as often.

The protagonists of the "realistic" **G.I. Joe** and **Vigilante** books spend an inordinate amount of time playing around with state-of-the-art implements of destruction, in spite of he fact that both series subscribe to the "shoot to wound" school. This preoccupation with guns, knives and other hardware may bestow an air of verisimilitude upon otherwise undistinguished books, but it certainly doesn't improve story values. Often, at least in the case of **G.I. Joe**, the content comes off as more of a catalogue of death-dealing ordinances rather than a comic book.

A fascination with firearms is not all that passes for realism in today's comic books. There has been a more mature portrayal of interpersonal relationships in the past few years, due mainly to Marvel's output. It may not be exactly how "real" people deal with romances, friendships, what-have-you, but at least it's a definite improvement over the banal handling that was so predominant 15 years or so ago.

Unfortunately, jaded readers seem to construe realism with the amount of blood splattered on the pages. Miller was one of the avatars of this particular movement, with his Daredevil being bloodily pummeled and hit by automobiles, but it worked within the story's context.

But then we had his Batman, who in the course of one story ("Hunt the Dark Knight") was beaten, stabbed and shot – twice! By the next installment, occurring only a few days later, Bruce Wayne felt hale and hearty enough to take on Superman. This is realism?

Moore's View

A question that leads directly to **The Watchmen.** Men, women and children die in unpleasant ways in this book. Blood flows unto like an open faucet. Faces are deformed by fists. Life is cheap, tenuous and brutal. However, combined with the graphic violence are some startlingly effective characterizations, sub-plots and moreover, attention to actual **story.**

In the case of **The Watchmen**, realism as defined by comics works, and it works in a manner that approaches brilliance. Even the most hardcore adherent to blood and guts will find their quaint tastes catered to in this title, but never is the story sacrificed for the sake of the violence.

The Watchmen, sadly, is something of an isolated incident. The trend toward careful delineation of violence can have only one possible outcome – reader surfeit and perhaps even censure. The super hero concepts were never meant for **this** kind of loving attention to detail.

Richard Clear, a proprietor of Merlin's Books in Tampa, Florida,tends to agree, saying, "We've got enough fundamentalists who **will** start trouble. They have to have a scapegoat."

He adds, though, that the very violent books sell quite well: "The readers demand it. They don't want sugar-coated violence anymore. As a result, we could see the same kind of fallout as in the '50s."

One publisher evidentally sees such an occurence as a strong possibility. DC recently issued an edict to its creative staff to make their newsstand books adhere more closely to Code regulations. This order made a few writers and artists unhappy, but one can sympathize with DC's aversion to being held up as a corrupter of youth. It is preferable to impose censorship from within than have it imposed from without.

Real and Relevant

Lately, though, the most popular trend, at least within the comics industry itself, is the refurbishing and redefinition of older, established characters. The cry of "make it real!" has become "make it real **and** relevant!" In this instance, the term "relevancy" is not to be confused with the ponderous melodramatic moralizing of The Green Latern/Green Arrow type.

Rather, it is a serious attempt to make super heroes just as viable to present-day sensibilities as they were two generations ago. So far, it seems to be working. DC blitzed the media with press releases about the new, improved versions of Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. By and large, the hoopla was not empty posturing. DC delivered on their promises, at least with the Big Three, and captured high sales, for the time being.

The first issue aficionados and speculators will eventually turn to other investment commodoties. Inevitably, the novelty of "New Heroes in Old Costumes" will begin to pall. Then the industry will scramble for other means of pumping up sales.

For a short time, this is likely to take some bizarre forms, judging by current trends. To quote from Richard Clear again, "Publishers will try to come up with even more grotesque characters. Someone will always try to put your worst nightmare on paper."

Hopefully, this will not come to pass. The Super concepts may not be totally mined out, but if ugliness and dark visions become the standard premise, their appeal will be only as transitory, curiosities. True enough, creators are confined by the built-on limitations of the comics medium, but undeniably some wonderful work has been done within these strictures.

Super-human Appeal

Super heroes are trapped within narrow parameters themselves. They cannot stray too far from the accepted norm, and expect to survive. Like the folk heroes of our country, they must conform to certain standards. Legend-makers of a century or so ago smoothly glossed over Davy Crockett's penchant for boozing and womanizing, focusing instead upon his "wringing a comet by the tail" and other super-human exploits.

Our need for closer identification with the dynamic figures in flashy outfits may (and in some cases, already has) remove

Lately, though, the most popular trend, at least within the comics industry itself, is the refurbishing and redefinition of older, established characters. The cry of "make it real!" has become "make it real and relevant!"

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that basic essential element of the super hero. Bruce Wayne cannot be psychologically dissected in too great a detail or will lose his essential purpose of existence, to inspire, thrill and above all, **entertain**.

The need for heroes is an inborn human trait. For all the best-selling exposes that have been written about such admired public figures as John Lennon and John Belushi, we still want – need – people to look up to, even vicariously.

Super heroes may fade from the four color pages again, eclipsed by other trends but this will only be a temporary effect. the appeal of the super hero is one that all humans instinctively respond to, despite self-imposed views on practicality and maturity.

The super hero is the folk tale of our particular niche in history. In the centuries to come, the stories could well become myth and legend, fact intertwined with fiction.

Their stories, even the stories of the most childish and obscure of super heroes, may serve in a very real sense as reflections of us all. **This concludes "The Never-Ending Super Hero Cycle." Beginning in the Forum section next issue is a three part examination of how the media perceives comic books.**

FC

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in review

Welcome to the "In Review" section of **Four Color Magazine.** We'd like to take a moment and explain our reviewing policies. Titles reviewed are chosen by our regular review staff from those available at direct sales outlets. Publishers wishing to submit advance copies of titles should send them to the editor-in-chief of **Four Color.** Advance copies must include the cover for reproduction. Submitted issues are randomly assigned to reviewers.

Four Color invites readers to submit their opinions of titles reviewed and matters addressed in this section. Essentially, **your** opinions of **our** opinions will make up a dialogue page that will be enjoyed by fellow readers and professionals in the comic book industry.

Ralphie-boy

Jackie Gleason must be a very busy guy. I'll bet his desk is piled high with contracts, scripts and other career-related paperwork, so it's understandable that he might overlook a comic book. That's the only reason I can imagine for High Note Publishing's **The Honeymooners** comic book receiving Gleason's personal approval, as Publisher David Singer boasts.

Incidentally, don't let the "High Note" appellation fool you, this is the same David Singer of **T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents,** Lodestone and Deluxe Comics fame. Only the names have been changed to – never mind. I assume the name for the newest sister corporation is an inside joke for Honeymoonies taken from the episode "Young Man With A Horn" (originally broadcast March 24, 1956), wherein Ralph strives to "hit the high note" with his life.

The Great One's desk must be the reason he approved the characterizations in this book, characterizations that violate many of the facets of the personae he and his cast created on the show. On one page, for example, writer Robert Loren Fleming and artist Vince Musacchia attempt to portray Ralph Kramden as a belligerent ox, which is fine, but his foil, Ed Norton, reacts totally out of character. Ralph here reduces Ed in seconds to a quivering, sweating blob. But on the television show, Ed was never afraid of Ralph, never shied from his onslaughts, and was never beyond insulting Ralph. The lone exception was Ed fleeing from the apartment when Ralph would bellow and point his finger at the door, but this was usually a plot contrivance to allow Ralph and Alice to be alone and Ed was usually back within minutes. Indeed, Ed was always confident that he always did the right thing, and he knew that it was just a matter of time until Ralph came to see things his way.

Further, Ralph threatens Ed with his famous "Bang! Zoom!" line, but on the show, Ralph never used that line on anyone but his wife, Alice, thus giving the line an underlying meaning that is destroyed in the comic book. To those who were aware of the intricacies of the characters' interrelationships, slips like that are particularly bothersome. "Bang! Zoom!" was Ralph's abbreviated way of threatening to belt Alice "to the moon," but everyone, Alice included, knew Ralph would never lay a violent hand on her, and "Bang! Zoom!" stood as an affirmation of Alice's dominance over Ralph, and of Ralph's love for Alice. When Ralph threatened Norton with the line, then, it undercut an unspoken aspect of Ralph's relationship with Alice.

One question that should be addressed is why this book was done in color! Of almost any book, **The Honeymooners** would have been most perfect in black-and-white; those were the colors of Ralph's milieu. The audience perceives his world in shades of gray, and those are the natural shades to portray it in. Actually, it's fairly unsettling to see their dingy black-and-white apartment in color, as if a High Note colorist is the arbiter of what gets which color. I suppose it was done in color to appease the audience (like a bull charging at red, comic book readers charge only at four-color), but it represents another violation of the characters' integrity. Maybe Gleason saw the pages before they were colored.

"Ralph's Sweet Tooth" is an adaptation of a "Lost Episode" (originally broadcast September 25, 1954) and it comes closer to hitting the "high note" in both characterization and story, but it's not hard to guess why. Musacchia's art is good throughout, although Fleming labors under the unenviable burden of translating Ralph's bluster into written dialogue (Honeymoonies "hear" the written dialogue as Ralph, I know, but I have to wonder how the uninitiated "hear" it).

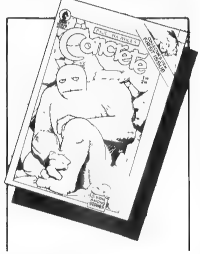
I'm hesitant to say that High Note's **The Honeymooners** is going to bump

up against the realization that the book is impossible to execute to the satisfaction of Honeymooners connoisseurs, because it is a first issue and there's always the chance I could be (happily) proven wrong. There's not much I'd like to see on the market more than a well-executed Honeymooners comic book. However, I can say the first issue gets trampled beneath the standards set by its broadcast predecessor. The book does, however, serve the valuable purpose of exposing people to the Honeymooners fan club, RALPH, of which they might have been otherwise unaware.

And if sales drop, maybe Singer can change the book's title to Wally Wood's H.O.N.E.Y.M.O.O.N.E.R.S. It's been done, you know.

Last, a plea to the Great One: Next time, take a minute to **read** this stuff, Jackie. It's your baby they're playing with.

– Tom Heintjes



Solid Entertainment Or, "A Stone Among Stones"

If you're going to stick with comics as a hobby over the long haul, it's a good idea to keep a mental list of books that can be used to counter the inevitable question, "Why does a grown person still read these things?" Oh sure, the recent notoriety of Frank Miller's **Dark Knight** and the Alan Moore/Dave Gibbons **Watchmen** series helps a great deal, but in a field dominated by adolescent male power fantasies, vengeance-oriented mutated critters and ducks, you need a lot more than two on your list.

I'm happy to add Paul Chadwick's **Concrete** to mine.

The premise for this series is deceptively simple: former political speechwriter trades his old, pudgy body for that of a seven foot tall, 1200-pound walking rock, and then the fun begins. Now, at the Big Two Comics Companies, the "fun" would probably include fighting crime and stomping supervillains. Luckily, this isn't the case. Chadwick's going for reality here, or at least as much reality as you can hope for when your main character is a stone giant.

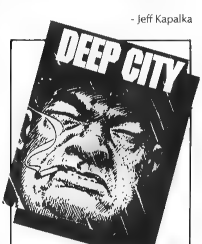
There's no origin story in **Concrete #1**, nor has one appeared in Concrete's prior run in **Dark Horse Presents**. The official story of how Ronald Lithgow, "sensitive and articulate one-time speechwriter for Senator Mark Douglas," became this crusty behemoth is that he's actually a government built cyborg. This is a lie, crafted to prevent panic (I suspect it actually has something to do with aliens). In any event, what Lithgow wants to do, now that he's Concrete, is to become an explorer/adventurer, and to support himself by writing about his exploits. To this end, he hires Larry Munro, "A charming, goofy, impoverished grad student who fancies himself a novelist." After all, when you're so big that you have to have furniture made out of cinder bocks, you're going to need who can type. Add one Dr. Maureen Vonnegut, the government biologist for whom Concrete is an ongoing study (and, in the words of David Letterman, "one fabulous babe"), and you have the book's core group. Also on hand in issue one are Concrete's former boss, Senator Douglas, who will turn up from time to time to point Concrete and company towards some sort of adventure, and NPR reporter Tawny Hill, whose Lois Lane-type snooping will probably reveal Concrete's true origins one of these days.

The story in issue one, "A Stone Among Stones" has to do with Concrete's attempts to rescue miners from a cave-in, but it's really about introducing the characters to us and to themselves. There are nice touches throughout, such as a publicity campaign to over-expose Concrete to the media, so that the public will get sick of hearing about him and leave him alone (I especially liked the "Concrete Rock Candy" with free action figure inside). Another nice touch is the running joke of having would-be novelist Larry describe his work-in-progress at great length to anyone showing the least bit of interest ("Okay, there's this guy, and he's really depressed, Okay? . . .).

Concrete's main strength is that it is a story about characters that one can relate to and like. The heroics, of prime importance to practically any other adventure strip, are secondary here. Chadwick, after having done only a handful of **Dazzler** for Marvel and the **Salimba 3-D** books for Blackthorne (at least, to my knowledge) has seemingly come out of nowhere to produce a series "rich in adventure, irony and character humor in a realistic setting," just like it says in the promotional material from Dark Horse.

Though no comic's destiny can be carved in stone, I can only hope that **Concrete** is set for a long and successful run.

- Jeff Kapalka



Buenos Aires Cop

The work of F. Solano Lopez is new to me, but judging by the work displayed in Catalan Communications' new book, **Evaristo: Deep City**, I feel safe in saying that the man is one of the greatest artists working in comics. Every page of his stories combines the eye of a genius film director with the soul and craft of an equally brilliant illustrator. There is more emotion and excitement in one of his panels than

you can find in a year's worth of stories by most artists considered to be fan favorites. While these are pretty strong claims, in Lopez's case they're not hyperbolic – the guy is really, really good.

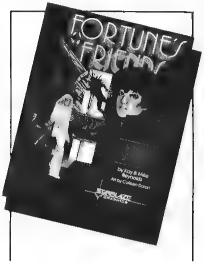
Lopez is an Argentinian comics artist who, with his writer C. Sampayo, has produced a stunning collection of stories about an aging, macho Buenos Aires policeman named Evaristo. The stories are akin to film noir, South American style, with much of their subtext concerning the political and social conditions of the country around the late fifties and early sixties, the time setting of the book. **Deep City's** similarity to American film noir comes from both the emotional mood of the stories and Lopez's darkly beautiful artwork, that evokes the genre's brooding, sinister qualities brilliantly.

Deep City follows detective Evaristo through his job and through his life, with the kind of attention to real life detail that has made a book like **Love and Rockets** so outstanding. The crime scenes are as riveting as any from the movies and Lopez's art conveys the humanity of his characters so well it's breathtaking. The stories are gritty and hard, but with an underlying sadness that is quite moving at times. The people in **Deep City** come from life, and this makes the stories in the book all the more absorbing.

But **Deep City** is, first and foremost, a showcase for the work of its artist Francisco Solano Lopez. He is simply a consummate comics artist who seems to know everything about telling a story with pictures. His panels teem with atmosphere and contain so much wonderful detail that every panel becomes a real world. He appears to know intuitively the perfect angle for every panel in order to wring every bit of drama from his story. All of this technical flash wouldn't mean so much, however, if Lopez's own emotions didn't come through so strongly on every page, imbuing his people with lives and feelings all their own.

To talk about the stories in **Deep City** too much would spoil them, and to try to describe some of Lopez's more stunning pages in detail would be to diminish the impact of his art. Needless to say, this is not standard comics fare, nor is it standard cops and robbers. Not all of the stories by writer C. Sampayo are totally effective and even those that are may be somewhat anti-climactic to readers used to the obvious grandiose endings of the typical comic book. but anyone with an interest in comics artwork of genius proportions has to get this book immediately – Mr. Lopez really is **that** good.

– Steve Monaco



Stroke of Good Fortune

Dark Knight and **Watchmen** aside, the only way comics are going to break out of the fan-ghetto, and on to the mainstream bookshelves, is when somebody actually makes an attempt to do something different. Donning/Starblaze is doing something different.

Take for example, **Hell Week,** the first in the **Fortune's Friends** series. To begin with, it doesn't **look** like a comic at first glance. It's in the European comic album format (eight and a half by eleven inches, square-bound, full color on glossy paper). The cover, a stylish montage of images from the story, seems almost sedate compared to the normal four-color funnybook. Most importantly, the words "comic," "comicbook" and "cartoon" are nowhere to be found in or on it (let's face it, those words to the world-at-large mean either guys and gals in spandex suits ready to throw a punch, or funny animals ready to throw a pie).

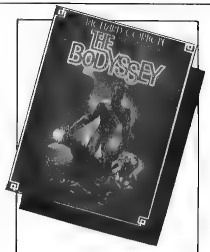
Authors Kay and Mike Reynolds aren't doing costumed do-gooders or teenage mutants today, thank you. **Fortune's Friends** is about the Franklin Fortune Detective Agency, the people who work there and the people they help. The focus (at least in this volume) is on fledgling P.I. Liz Monroe and Page, the seasoned professional who takes her under his wing. No romance here, though. Page happens to be gay. There are a lot of lovable characters who work for the agency (it's the kind of place that Mary Richards would have wound up if she hadn't gone into television news). Let's see, there's Fortune senior, the not-gruff, but still lovable head of the firm; Fortune junior, the worthless son; and Bernie and Morrie Klein, the fun-loving Allen Funts of the P.I. circuit.

Yes, the characters are engaging. Perhaps **too** engaging for the plot of the story. And since it **is** a "mystery-suspense" type story, I'll reveal no details, other than the fact that Monroe and Page solve the problem. Surprise! The villain of the piece is a villain through-and-through, motivated by pure greed. Now, that'd be just fine in a **comicbook,** but one expects more from a "graphic album." Also, our heroes just sort of stumble into the villain's schemes while investigating something else (coincidence is a fine plot device, but still . . .). These, however, are minor cavils, as the characters **are** so engaging that they could carry the book with just scenes from the day-to-day operations in the office.

And when the characters are **that** appealing, (in a comic **or** a graphic album) a lot of credit also has to go to the artist, in this case, Colleen Doran. Ms. Doran has a very attractive, high-fashion style that has more than a little Japanese **manga** influence (an influence not usually found in stories that don't contain samurai, ninjas or giant robots). Her people look like **real** people and their facial expressions range from the subtle to the priceless. The only complaint I have about the art is that it's sometimes **too** clean. Even her cockroaches are well groomed!

All-in-all, it's a stroke of good fortune for comics that Donning/Starblaze is serving up **Fortune's Friends.** You can get awfully tired of a diet of spandex and pie.

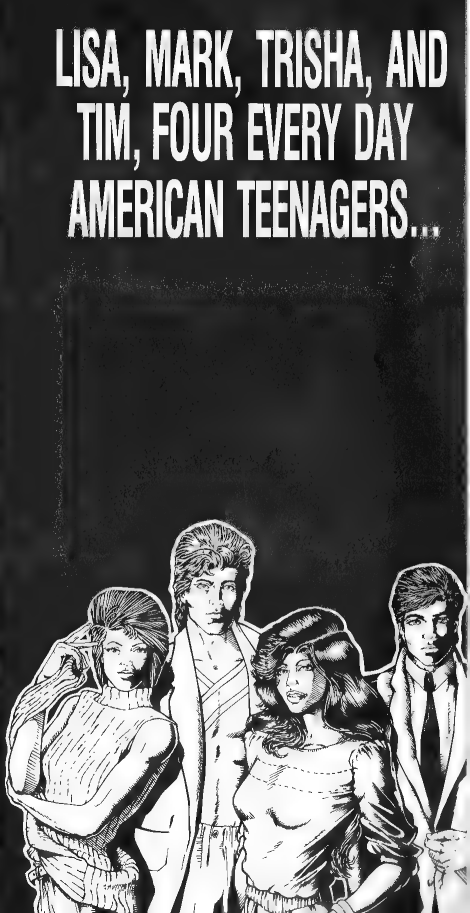
– Jeff Kapalka



Big Boobed Bodyssey

It's a little sad to look at some of Richard Corben's recent commercial work, like the stories collected in Catalan Communications' new deluxe color volume of **The Bodyssey**. It's sad because it makes you think about what might have been. Corben had the talent and the vision at one point to become the next Frazetta. Instead he seems to have become mired in the big-boob soft-core fantasy/porn genre, and it's this ugly-minded work that has become virtually all he's best known for. Corben's amazing talent shines through in places during **The Bodyssey**, but not nearly enough, and even when it does it still can't transcend the sleaziness of the story.

The Bodyssey was inspired by a portfolio of Corben's titled "Scenes From The Magic Planet" and all eight black-and-white plates are printed PAGEin the back of the volume. While the art isn't top-notch Corben and the scenes for these pieces are all based on the more pornographic aspects of EV PCorben's work, the verve and craft in these pictures is far superior to what is found in the stories themselves. His art in the color episodes of **The Bodyssey** is a frustrating mixed bag, with one or two truly impressive pages followed by two or three more of work that's mediocre at best. Much of the art looks rushed (although Corben is so good that even when he's rushed he's better than most), and for a guy with the kind of breast fetish that Corben



seems to have, he has incredible problems keeping his ladies' bosoms symmetrical from panel to panel.

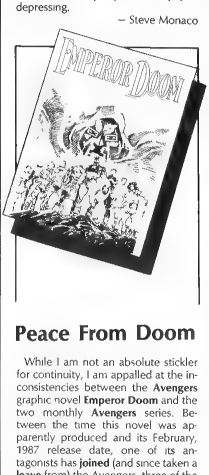
From the dramatic events portrayed in Corben's portfolio pieces come the padded-out episodes that comprise **The Bodyssey**. The story involved the picaresque adventures "From The Magic Planet" and all eight black-and-white plates are printed in the back of the volume. While the art isn't top-notch Corben and the scenes for these pieces are all based on the more pornographic aspects of Corben's work, the verve and craft in these pictures is far superior to what is found in the stories themselves. His art in the color episodes of **The Bodyssey** is a frustrating mixed bag, with one or two truly impressive pages followed by two or three more of work that's mediocre at best. Much of the art looks rushed (although Corben is so good that even when he's rushed he's better than most), and for a guy with the kind of breast fetish that Corben seems to have, he has incredible problems keeping his ladies' bosoms symmetrical from panel to panel.

From the dramatic events portrayed in Corben's portfolio pieces come the padded-out episodes that comprise **The Bodyssey**. The story involved the picaresque adventures of a mostly-naked hero named Pilgor, who becomes stranded on the Magic Planet while attempting to rescue his wife from a sorcerer named Hunghoul. He meets a snake-man named Ygtna who is also searching for his lady love (with typical Corben over-attributes) and the two wind up in the clutches of castration-crazed amazons. It's about this point in the story that the bouncing flesh and oozing body fluids go into overkill.

The only thing that seems to be added to the implicit narrative of Corben's series of plates is collaborator Simon Revelstroke's dialogue, that is one big reason why the portfolio is so much better. Revelstroke seems to specialize in the smutty pun, and by the end of this very slim volume I didn't care if I never heard a dirty joke again. Revelstroke hammers relentlessly at his single entendres (none of which should probably be repeated here, if only because none of them are funny), slowing down an already-dragging story even more. While a certain degree of sexism seems to be inherent in this kind of barbarian-fantasy genre, Corben and Revelstroke really do come across as classic chauvinist pigs with much of the material in **The Bodyssey** and their mincing, lisping "queen" prince is the kind of offensive gay stereotype most intelligent readers will find cruel and repugnant.

The Bodyssey is obviously intended to be humorous, but it's too offensive to be funny. However, if someone finds something to laugh at in it, I guess it's their business. On the other hand, the thought that someone out there might find this stuff **erotic** is kind of scary. More than anything, though, when you consider the talent at waste here, **The Bodyssey** is mainly just depressing.

— Steve Monaco



Peace From Doom

While I am not an absolute stickler for continuity, I am appalled at the inconsistencies between the **Avengers** graphic novel **Emperor Doom** and the two monthly **Avengers** series. Between the time this novel was apparently produced and its February, 1987 release date, one of its antagonists has **joined** (and since taken a **leave** from) the Avengers, three of the featured characters have left the team and four other characters have changed costumes.

For the record, the Sub-Mariner, who becomes a pawn of Dr. Doom in this story, left the Avengers seven months ago (#272), having joined the team 19 months ago (#262), one month after Starfox departed (#261). Curiously, Starfox is portrayed here as an active Avenger, along with the Vision and the Scarlet Witch, both of whom left the Avengers over two years ago (#255)! At this point, I'm too tired to track down the issues of **West Coast Avengers** in which the costumes of Hawkeye, Mockingbird, Tigra and Wonder Man were altered (in the latter's case, though, the glitch in continuity is a pleasant one. Any and all of Wonder Man's previous outfits are far superior to the garish nightmare he currently sports). Just how long has this story been sitting on the shelf? Frankly, I am not the least bit happy about Marvel releasing, especially at a price of $5.95, a book that is so far out of touch with the continuity the company is noted for.

On the other hand, there's no getting around the fact that, while it is not exactly a classic, this is a good, solid story. Author David Michelinie, an **Avengers** veteran, spins an interesting tale of "the world according to Doom," the outcome of which Doom himself might not have anticipated.

Tapping the mind-control power of Killgrave, the Purple Man, Dr. Doom effects a peaceful takeover of the world, with the assistance of his erstwhile ally, the Sub-Mariner. Only Wonder Man (the Avenger with whom Michelinie is closely identified) escapes Doom's domination and he frees a group of fellow Avengers to liberate the rest of the world. Sounds simple, doesn't it?

This is not, however, a simple story. The undeniable fact is that Doom proves to be a just and capable, if absolute, ruler. His conquered world is one of peace, order and prosperity. While there would seem to be an obvious conflict between Doom (conqueror) and the Avengers (liberators), their positions are almost reversed. When the Avengers find that they are forced to choose, on behalf of the world, between the safety of benevolent subjugation and the relative uncertainties that go hand-in-hand with freedom of choice, they must face the fact that they may actually be a disruptive force in the very world they seek to protect. Doom, on the flip side, finds that winning the prize is often far less fulfilling than striving for it and is forced to re-evaluate his ultimate goal of world-domination.

In addition to weaving an interesting tale, Michelinie displays a good grasp of each Avenger's character, from

Captain America's staunch determination, to Hawkeye's loyalty and devotion to Iron Man's potential weakness of will and his ability to conquer it. Bob Hall, former artist on both Avengers books, turns in a cleanly rendered art job, pleasant to look at and easy to follow. As Michelinie captures each Avenger's character, Hall gives each an individual look, as well If Wonder Man could be consistently portrayed this well, he would have no problem supporting his own title.

So, it's a toss-up. If you like a good, well-crafted story, **Emperor Doom** might be worth your while. If continuity inconsistencies will frustrate you, this one will drive you nuts!

Joseph J. Cicala

Indiana Kent

No, no, no, no, no, no, **no!**

I hate to be so negative on a comic that I really **want** to like, but I just can't help it. After many months of the Man of Steel going out of his way to avoid becoming his alter-ego, we finally get a glimpse of the (formerly) mild-mannered reporter in action (or rather, in **Superman #5**, "The Mummy Strikes"). But instead of the (formerly) mild-mannered reporter, we get Indiana Kent in the Pyramid of Death.

Now, is it just me, or was one of the original strengths of **Superman** (the concept) the idea of the nebbish with a Secret? The nobody who, when danger threatened, became the powerful force of Good? Sure seemed that way to me. Putting it another

...WELL ...ALMOST.

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way, Clark Kent was the average guy's imagined self — a nice guy, but nobody special. Superman, on the other hand, was the fantasy self, the Hero one would become after being pushed too far (if only one could find a phone booth).

Well, if it was, it's gone now. John Byrne's Clark Kent is a man of daring, ready and able to leap into the jungles of Costa Del Marco to help Lois Lane out of trouble. This Clark is handsome, athletic, desired by women, and successful in his career. Why on earth would he ever **want** to turn into Superman?

In this issue, at any rate, he doesn't. You see, he didn't have time to shave this morning before taking off for his South America rescue mission, so rather than have Superman **and** Clark seen with face fuzz, Kent opts to stay Kent for the remainder of the book, displaying a range of courage and ability beyond those of mortal men (to coin a phrase). The only remnant of Clark's loser image is his lack of ability to get anywhere with Lois and even **this** is undercut by a rather . . . interesting dream sequence, involving a certain Amazon princess (spicy cookies!).

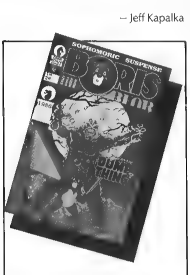
Now all of this might be an honest attempt to develop a more believable Clark Kent. It just seems counterproductive to do this at the expense of Superman (**Wrong,** that is). If you have a Loser become a Hero, that's great. If you have a hero become a hero . . . well, what's the point?

On the plus side of this issue, no one can complain that it isn't **drawn** well. Superman (when shown) just exudes power, nobility and heroism, and the giant mummy of the story's title is a fearsome thing indeed, reminiscent of old Jack Kirby monster books. The art team of Byrne and Karl Kesel is top notch, no doubt about it.

Also nice is the way Byrne finds new ways for Superman to use his powers. For example, rather than make a beeline to South America, Supes takes a sub-orbital path out of earth's atmosphere and falls back to earth, down into the southern hemisphere, just like programming a missle trajectory (it might not work in real life, but it sure **sounds** plausible). And then there are those Lexcorp signs all over the place! They might not have anything to do with the story at hand but they do serve to remind the reader just how far-reaching Lex Luthor's influence is.

And what is the story at hand? It's the old "Superman to the Rescue" scenario, inspired by a 40's Fleischer cartoon (entitled, strangely enough, "The Mummy Strikes"), as well as the **Doctor Who** story "Pyramids of Mars." Lois gets into trouble at an archaeological dig, and the mummies escaping from the crypt just may be from outer space. Still, a plot is a plot and the true test of a storyteller is how well he can weave his tales from the available material. "The Mummy Strikes" is only the first half of a two-part tale. We'll have to wait until next month to see how well Byrne wraps this one up.

— Jeff Kapalka



Bear Facts

Boris the Bear is an entertaining, witty, well-drawn and downright **funny** comic book. I never thought it would get to issue five.

Let me explain . . .

Boris started out as a one-joke book. In issue one, he got fed up with all the "Teenage Radioactive Black Belt Mutant Ninja Critters" and decided to systematically wipe them out. This he did, with great relish, and a machine gun. In issue two, he got fed up with robots (giant and otherwise) and decided to wipe **them** out. Issue three found him getting upset with reasonable facsimiles of a certain company's heroes due to the reasonable facsimile of corporate guys' treatment of a reasonable facsimile of a major comics creator. He didn't wipe 'em out this time. He just made them see the light. Would that reality mirrored comics.

Unchecked, at this rate, Boris could've wiped out comics as we know them (including his own) in just a few more issues. But then something happened: In issue four, Boris underwent an origin. We finally saw what Boris was (a robot), and how he came to be, in a not-quite parody of standard super hero origins. Issue four also introduced us to Wacky Squirrel, who gave back some of what Boris was dishing out and somewhere along the line, the bear became more real.

Now comes along **Boris the Bear #5**, and in a story entitled "Where Walks the Dump Thing," our ersatz ursine has to face up to the consequences of his past actions. You see, due to Boris' purge of trendy jump-on-the-bandwagon characters, there was a Great Comicbook Dumping. "Bundles of books . . . tons of tomes . . . carloads of characters . . . Never **seen** . . . never **read** . . . (were) consigned to the rubbish-heap . . . **Forever.**" But there was "a **spark** in those books . . . a **spirit** . . . that would not . . . die" and from the morass of pulp and printer's ink came . . . The Dump Thing — he who must be read! Can Boris save comics fandom from this latest threat? Search me. .

In this issue, Michael Richardson, Randy Stradley and Steven Mattson have come up with a story that's a parody/homage to Alan Moore's work on DC's **Swamp Thing**, a commentary on comics collecting and a darn good read (that I refuse to spoil with further comment). Boris creator and artist James Dean Smith turns in another fine comic-art job, excelling not only in the cartoony form of Boris and the contrast with his "realistic" surroundings, but also in his evocations of the comic characters being spoofed. Be especially on the lookout this issue for Boris in the role of the Flaming Carrot "Ut!"

The book's backup feature is a solo Wacky Squirrel story written and illustrated by Jim Bradrick. The Tex Avery-styled zaniness is okay filler, I suppose, but I'd rather be reading more Boris.

— Jeff Kapalka

What do a sentient, starfaring dragon and a 14 year old street urchin have in common?

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DRAGON'S STAR

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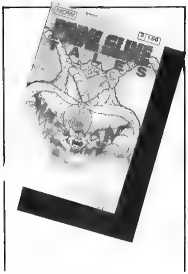

Pure Slime

Tony Basilicato's **Prime Slime Tales** (published by NOW Comics) is the kind of time-killer feature that in less-booming comics times might have served as a back-up filler for something more substantial. With the black-and-white comics explosion that's still taking place, however, Basilicato's strip has its own full-length, bi-monthly book. While **Prime Slime** is okay for what it is, it doesn't merit its own title, and even though Basilicato has some talent as a cartoonist, his characters don't have the charm to sustain 24 pages of story, even when it's mostly action and chase scenes.

Prime Slime Tales #3's story is titled "Roach Wars," and the title tells it all. The Slime gang, that includes a bosomy beauty named Nervana and a Top Cat clone called Zig, battle their junkyard nemeses, the roaches. Midway through the battle, the bugs unveil their secret weapon, a giant robot named MetaRoach. And that, quite simply, is the plot. Basilicato fills his pages with big panels and big sound effects, but oversize "ZRAKK!s" and "AAAAAARRRR!s" don't exactly make up for an absence of story.

Basilicato's art has a nice animated cartoon feel to it at times, but often his panel breakdowns are a bit muddled, with those big sound-effects making an inferior substitute for well-defined action shots. His characters and their dialogue are even less satisfying, and despite their exaggerated mannerisms, none of them stand out as the kind of engaging comics personality that would make a reader come back for more.

I'll give Prime Slim Tales this much – its non-stop "Roach Wars" in this issue are no less competently done than most Marvel blast-fests, so if that's all you want from comics, this book may be for you. If, on the other hand, you have even passing interest in likable characters and stories with something more than just "KA-BOOMs," you'll probably want to pass this one up.

– Steve Monaco

Fowl Six-Shooter

EB'NN #5 was the first issue of Now Comis' series that I'd seen and its Matt Wagner cover, depicting a poncho-wearing raven brandishing a six-shooter in one hand and a smoking cheroot in the other, led me to believe that the series might have a strong Sergio Leone influence. No such luck. Judging by the book's interior story and art, the main influence on **Eb'nn** seems instead to be the old **Kid Colt** comics Marvel produced 20-some years ago. While those books weren't awful, they

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certainly weren't anything special and I'm afraid the same can be said of **Eb'nn**, too.

Eb'nn is a slight variation on the current trend of grafting "funny" animal characters onto traditionally "serious" comics situations (I put both terms in quotes mainly because most comics critters these days aren't too funny even when they mean to be). It is also hard to believe even the most avid enthusiast of the genre could consider the situations of most commercial comics **serious.**) **Eb'nn's** gimmick is that it's the first book (apparently) to try this switcheroo on the Western comic, with characters that fit the stereotypes of the genre in every way except, of course, that they're dogs and rabbits instead of men.

Other than its funny-animal changes, a trick that has lost all of its novelty by now, there's not much else about **Eb'nn** that even a casual comics follower hasn't seen over and over again. Eb'nn is a feathered Clint Eastwood imitator who drifts across an Old West populated by talking animals while riding a cockroach instead of a horse. In this issue he meets a character named Dirty Dingo Dawg (a not-too-imaginative name no matter what genre you're working in) and the whole story involves Eb'nn's attempts to take this dangerous prisoner to jail safely.

About the best thing to be said for Mike Dimpsey's script is that it moves fairly fast. The story is filled with cliches -- the earnest young "cub" who admires the villain, dialogue from the "consarn yuh" school of comics scripting -- but Dimpsey keeps the story moving well enough to at least hold the reader's interest to the end. Once he gets there, unfortunately, the reader has little reason to come back next time for more. Besides the predictable story, the art in **Eb'nn** (by Chris Ecker and Brian Thomas) is static and unexciting. In the book's climactic wordless sequence, where the art alone carries the story, there is none of the tension necessary to make such a scene work. It's obvious though from the jump-cut style they use that the artists were striving mightily for it.

If you have to make such distinctions, I'd say **Eb'nn** isn't a flop so much as it is a dud. Paging Sergio Leone.

-- Steve Monaco

RANDOM REACTIONS

JUSTICE LEAGUE #1

An exciting new beginning for a venerable old series. For the most part, individual characterizations were handled well, although you'd never know that this new, child-like Captain Marvel has anything akin to the "wisdom of Solomon." The Batman-Guy Gardner interactions were exceptionally well-handled, reminiscent, without being derivative, of the better Captain America-Hawkeye clashes of the early Avengers tales. One question, though. Where the heck did Mr. Miracle come from? Seems to me he just waltzed into headquarters without so much as an introduction (or even a **Legends** appearance).

THOR #378

The unveiling of the Thunder God's (rather appealing) new body armor would have been much more dramatic had we not already seen it in last month's **Avengers** and **Avengers vs. X-Men.** Good story, though, with a more mature look at the Thor-Loki relationship.

BOOSTER GOLD #15

Among the new generation of DC titles, this stands out as a solid, entertaining series. Unlike the late **Blue Devil, Booster Gold** has a lighthearted approach **and** a storyline serious enough to satisfy fans of more traditional super-heroics. This issue wraps up Booster's origin, for the time being, and sets the stage for the next series of adventures.

SHAZAM: THE NEW BEGINNING #1

If, according to Roy Thomas, "modern day comics readers . . . respond best to more **realistic** renderings of Cap," why have the supremely silly names of Beautia and Magnificus been given anew to Sivana's children? All in all, this reworking of the Captain Marvel legend is vastly more ferbose and involved than the original version, while maintaining very little of the latter's basic power or appeal.

THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN #427

Whether or not you care for the new approach to Superman, you have to admit that artist Jerry Ordway treats us to a visual spectacular in this issue. His Shuster-esque, yet modern, Man of Steel appears in all of his classic poses -- with bullets bouncing off his chest, hoisting enormous weights high over his head and flying into battle against overwhelming odds. Even though the inking is a bit heavy in a number of spots and the zip-a-tone is, I think, overused, this is definitely a fun book to **look** at, if not to read.

ALPHA FLIGHT #46

Page two of this issue accomplishes a feat I had previously deemed impossible, summing up exactly what has occurred in this series since the departure of John Byrne. It's not that the individual stories have been poorly crafted. They've just not seemed to be especially memorable nor have they blended into an effective continuity.

WEST COAST AVENGERS #20

A real trip down memory lane, in more ways than one. Not only does author Steve Englehart skillfully sew the threads of Marvel history and multiple storylines into a fun and fast-paced story, he also successfully recaptures the unique style he brought to this book's parent title over a decade ago. Here's hoping he can work the same kind of magic when he takes over the writing chores on the floundering **Fantastic Four.**

-- Joseph J. Cicala

FC

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SHADOWS OF KAFKA (cont. from pg. 46)

will speak for attribution. "He's the sweetest little guy you could imagine," one Marvel editor said. "Everyone loves him because he's such an important part of the industry. We will always have work for Steve Ditko at Marvel, but he's not interested in doing the characters he's so well known for."

A DC staffer recalls Ditko during the 60s: "He was sort of an Everyman in my opinion. He'd pass by in the street and you'd never notice him. He was very much a rather hermitish type of person. He never had a social life in the comics field. I know he was very dedicated in his work because he knew what he wanted. And he usually got what he wanted."

But not always. Ditko has always been a stickler for inking his own work. In recent years, as comics rendering techniques have changed, he's been saddled with a host of young inkers whose job it is to bring his work in line with the 80s mainstream. His attitude has become one of not caring what happens to his art if he can't ink it himself

It's an almost unknown fact that prior to his comics debut in **Fantastic Fears**, Steve Ditko worked as an assistant to Batman artist Jerry Robinson. Robinson describes him as "quiet" and remembers only that, "He was fascinated by Batman."

Another friend, asked what Steve Ditko was like, offered this succinct answer:

"Read Ayn Rand's **Atlas Shrugged**. It's all there."

Spider-days

Those who have been privileged to visit Ditko in his Manhattan studio recall that during his **Spider-Man** days, Ditko had covered the walls with large maps of the familiar Spider-Man haunts. Aunt May's house, the Empire State University campus and other places. Meticulously, Ditko had laid out the important locales to insure consistency from issue to issue. Later, when he realized his readers didn't seem to notice the extra effort, Ditko became disenchanted. And when, in 1965, he abruptly quit Marvel in a still-unclear dispute with Stan Lee, those maps came off the walls and Ditko vowed never again to draw either **Spider-Man** or **Dr. Strange**. He's been inflexibly true to that posture since then.

In a sense, Ditko's career has been in a decline ever since. Nothing he has touched has appealed as much to the buying public. Over 20 years since his most popular work, Steve Ditko is inexorably approaching retirement age. When that time comes, says one who knows him, "He's probably going to go back to Philadelphia, where he came from, and disappear **forever**."

Those who have grown up on Steve Ditko's magic can only wish him happiness and maybe – just maybe – one last great success in his chosen field beford that time comes.

And if, along the way, Steve Ditko finally does consent to that long-deferred interview, he'll at last speak for himself with more than pen and ink.

But don't count on it. Steve Ditko made up his mind to do no interviews many years ago.

"He's very much a principled man," explains one colleague. "He has his precepts set. And he will not change them. He **cannot** give in."

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Twilight

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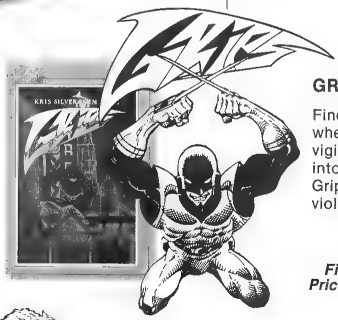

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By Barry Dutter

on the racks

How do you break into comics?

This is a question on the minds of many comics fans (including the author of this article). To get the answer, we went to one writer, one artist and one editor from three of the major comic companies.

Cat Yronwode, editor in chief of the Eclipse Comics line, said that there are two parts to breaking into the business – the formal way and the informal way.

The formal way involves writing to Eclipse for their penciller's and writer's guidelines, free for a self-addressed-stamped envelope.

The guidelines, according to Ms. Yronwode, 'show what we're looking for. They tell artists how to produce a five page sequence of comic art and writers how to plot a complete short story. My assistant and I then look at all submissions.'

Currently the only books that Eclipse is looking for people to work on are their anthology comics, **Tales of Terror** and **Alien Encounters**.

The informal route, Yronwode explained, involves artists doing spot illos for fanzines and writers sending in a lot of letters to comic book letters pages.

She stressed that it's important to 'get into print. Get your name known to comics pros.' Ms. Yronwode recommended that prospective artists 'work in the graphic art field,' and that writers 'don't just concentrate on writing fiction.

'Write LOCs to comics. At Eclipse, I read every letter, then pass them on to the editors. Critical articles are also a good training ground. Anybody who writes fiction should have some talent in writing expository prose.'

Ms. Yronwode feels that no formal training is needed for writers, as you either know it or you don't.

Mostly Ms. Yronwode encourages aspiring writers and artists to contribute to fanzines. 'Editors read fanzines. I look at every one that comes in. If someone writes a really in-depth article about one of our characters, I'll certainly remember them.'

Jeff Rajcilla

The main thing is getting your name known.

Walt Simonson, artist of Marvel's **X-Factor**, feels that it takes two things to break into comics, talent and a break. 'And if you have the talent, you'll get the break. 'I went to art school,' said Simonson, 'and it was there that I developed an interest in comics, in telling stories.

'My senior thesis was a comic – actually it was done over two years, my junior and senior years. And when I graduated from art school, that became my portfolio that got me work at the comic companies.'

But Simonson doesn't see this route as being the only one for artists to follow. 'If you look at pro comic artists, very few have gone to art school. A lot of guys in comics have had no formal training.'

While you may not need training, there is one item Simonson feels every aspiring artist should have. 'The most important thing is to have an effective portfolio and there's no easy road to that.

'You're only as good as your portfolio.'

Simonson added that, as a comic artist, "there are a lot of problems to be solved. In fact, there are so many problems to solve, it isn't necessary to solve them all equally well."

"The important thing is to be able to tell a story effectively."

Steve Englehart, who writes for both DC and Marvel, feels that it's a lot tougher for a writer than an artist to break into comics. This is because with an artist, editors can just look at his work, "but with a writer, they actually have to take the time to read the stuff."

Englehart feels it is important to show editors what you can do. "You have to prove to them that you can do characters, that you can do a plot and move it along within the ramifications of a comic book."

The best way to do this is to script some pages of comic art, according to Englehart. "If you've got a friend who can draw, you can script his pages. I heard Jim Shooter say recently that you should borrow the **Marvel Try-Out Book** from somebody, since it's too expensive to buy."

"Or you can buy the **Try-Out Book** at a comic store. You can dialogue the pages in that book. It's a good way to show editors how you handle a comic book script."

Englehart also recommends living in the vicinity of some major comics publishers. "Being in the neighborhood of the companies is helpful. So many books are being published these days, there's a greater chance of deadlines being missed." And when a pro fails to come through, that opens the door for more newcomers to get work.

Ms. Yronwode concluded that her company is "always looking for new talent." However, she adds that the worst thing you can do is send in your resume. "I don't want to see someone's resume. I want an example of what they can do."

F.C.

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